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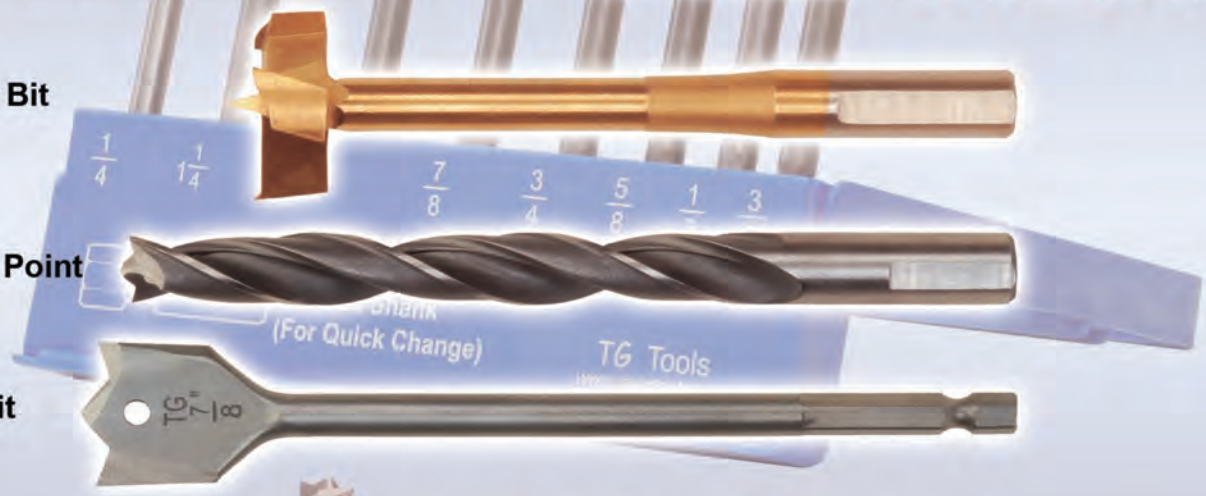

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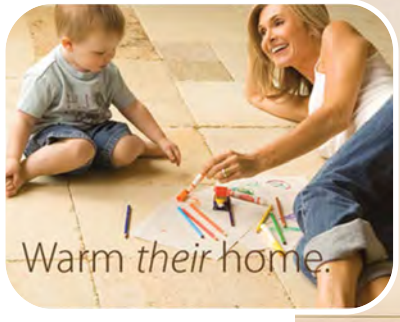

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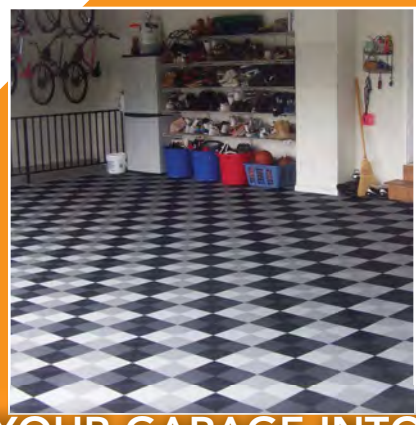

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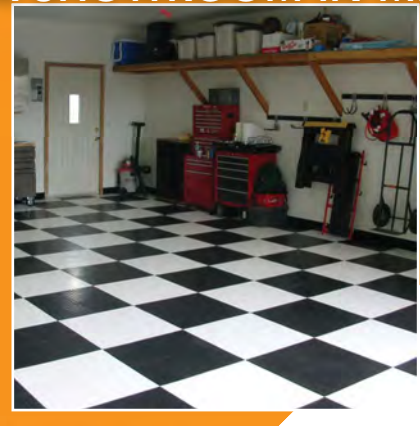

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LETTER *From The Editor-In-Chief*

There's an old saying: People don't plan to fail, but they often fail to plan. And I'm guilty of doing exactly that during the fence-building project shown in this issue of *EHT*.

My home state of Alabama had been in the thralls of drought for the better part of two years, which wreaked havoc on vegetation but made it easy to tackle those outdoor home improvements. I grew so accustom to the dry weather that I became a little too complacent. I took for granted that I could knock out this fence in just a little over a week, and have the story complete with full photography for the magazine you're holding. But the Man Upstairs had other ideas.

Cue the rain. Right about the time I started to string my fence layout, the rain fell in buckets, and kept doing so for three weeks straight. My neighborhood faced a daily flood as if to suddenly compensate for the arid climate of the past several seasons. The weather was throwing a big wrench in my plans, and these how-to stories have a due date. I was facing the press deadline and had to work in the rain to meet it. Being at the onset of winter, the work was cold, wet and dreary, and most of my photos had the dull gray pallor of sidewalk sludge.

A better plan would have been to start this project several months ago, providing some just-in-case time for inclement weather. Then I could have worked at my own pace without rushing—which can and did lead to errors. (Like, when I built my ladder into the fence by inadvertently threading the stringers through the rungs and nailing them in place.) Plus, for major outdoor projects, I prefer to work in the warmth of spring. What was I was doing in the spring? Working on my indoor projects, that's what. I had it backward.

I managed to build as much fence as was necessary for the how-to aspect of the article, but suffice to say I've still got a lot of nailing ahead of me. Oh, and sorry there's no section on constructing the gate. As soon as I build it, I'll post the story on www.extremehowto.com.

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A. Copper has a tendency to develop a green patina with age. This oxidation occurs when the copper is directly exposed to outdoor elements or acidic conditions. To keep your fire pit in its original condition, some professionals recommend using Bar Keeper's Friend. You can also polish the copper surface and then apply furniture polish or car wax to seal the surface and prevent a patina from forming. A cheaper alternative is to rub the surface with salt and vinegar or lemon wedges, and then rinse thoroughly. This method of deep cleansing should be performed routinely about once a month. If you prefer a more natural look, clean with regular kitchen soap or liquid detergent, and a caramel brown patina will eventually appear. A longer-term solution would be to put several coats of lacquer on the copper surface. Regardless of the product you choose, any coating will have to be reapplied periodically to maintain a pristine look.

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A: You'll need to rent a floor buffer with a sanding screen, which has abrasive on both sides. Use it to take off the top surface of the finish and prepare it for the next coat of urethane. You may need to use a hand sander to smooth the areas that are already worn down. Then put down a new coat of oil-based polyurethane, probably about three coats. Apply the poly with a lamb's wool applicator and allow plenty of drying time.

Q: *Is there any special wiring required to replace a regular electrical switch with a dimmer switch?*

A: A typical residential dimmer switch needs no special wiring to install, and will easily replace a standard toggle switch. Plus, a bulb dimmed to half brightness saves energy by using roughly half the power. When choosing a dimmer switch, the main thing to keep in mind is the wattage limit of the dimmer switch. Dimmers are usually rated for 600 to 1,000 watts of lighting, which is indicated on the packaging. Calculate the total wattage of the bulbs to be controlled by the dimmer and choose the wattage rating accordingly. The wattage rating should be at least 10 percent higher than the load it carries (20 percent if used in 2-gang or larger electrical box). Never use a dimmer switch on fluorescent fixtures or ceiling fan motors. Although, some models of the new Energy Star-qualified Compact Fluorescent Light bulbs (CFLs) can be connected to a dimmer. Make sure the CFLs specify use with dimmers or three-way fixtures on the package. EHT

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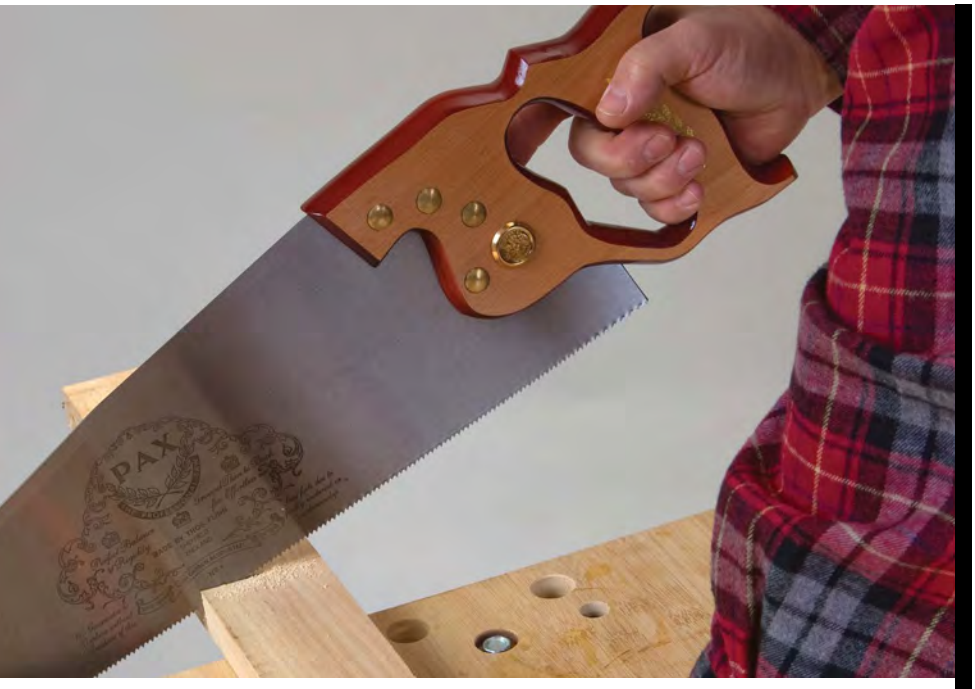

Always ready for work, this Pax panel saw from Thomas Flinn (sold by Lee Valley) is made of high carbon steel to take an especially sharp edge.

By Charlie Self

Power saws dominate the home project scene, and have for more than five decades now. Yet a handsaw is often the fastest and easiest way to do a small, or moderate-sized, job in wood, plastic or metal. The need is less today than it was when I began working with an old Polish carpenter who thought I was the slowest helper he'd ever had, but it still exists.

Today's handsaws are the result of thousands of years of development, from the first Stone Age versions chipped from local rocks to the more accurately patterned metal shapes of the Bronze and early Iron Ages, to today's incredible variety of very tough steels in many alloys, with many treatments. The first saws were used for everything—a single pattern for multiple jobs. That still often works, but a panel saw, essential for cutting lumber to length or width, is quickly ruined—as it wastes the user's energy—when doing jobs such as pruning brush and trees, while using a hacksaw on wood is a taxi ride to the nuthouse.

WHY USE HANDSAWS?

Handsaws today are convenient and quick. Handsaws are ready to go when picked up. Power tools require a cord, an extension cord, or batteries which must be kept charged … and often aren't ready for an hour. For smaller jobs, being able to grab and go is a big plus. Handsaws are cheaper than power saws (quality being equal). Not needing electrical power is essential when you're a long way from an outlet.

One secret to getting the best results, while using the least energy, with any tool is correct selection for the job's purposes. There are handsaws for all materials, whether wood, plasterboard, plastic or a variety of metals. With some materials, handsaws give better results than power saws. Acrylic and other plastics may melt at higher power saw speeds, but cut nicely with handsaws.

Another simple secret: Keep a handsaw in good shape, sharp and free of rust, stored in a manner that doesn't crook the blade.

WHERE TO BEGIN

Simplicity hides when it is time to select a saw, or several saws. Buying handsaws you won't use just because you like their looks or the sales pitch is a fantastic way to piddle away money. Yet it's a good idea to have a selection of handsaws for those just-in-case jobs.

Saw selection starts with type, then moves to a set of initials you'll often see, tpi, or Teeth per inch, which is a classification that can show performance. Wood cutting panel saws range from 5-1/2 Points per inch (ppi) for cutting with the grain (ripping)

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to 25 ppi (for very fine crosscutting, usually found in Japanese saws). Today, few people use rip saws. Most how-to work is easily done with saws ranging from 9 ppi (coarse) to 12 ppi (fine). To get tpi, subtract one from the points-per-inch number. Either is a sign of cut smoothness; the more teeth or points per inch, the smoother the cut. Rip saws use a chisel pattern tooth to chip out the wood, while crosscut saws use a knife edge to slice through the fibers. Rip saw teeth are filed at 90 degrees to the face of the blade; crosscut saw teeth are sharpened at an angle, usually about 65 degrees. Both saws have teeth set at an angle to the blade. Set is fixed, and determined by the tool used to produce it.

Shown are three European-pattern hand saws.

For crosscut saws, use coarse teeth (8 tpi) and a wide set for green lumber, fine teeth (10 or 12 tpi) and a closer set for dry, seasoned lumber to be used for finish work.

SAW TYPES

Panel saws are needed in many areas, and use the rip/crosscut categories. Blade lengths vary, but the big change these days is in the method of

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shaping the teeth. Stanley's SharpTooth™ is a design that allows high speed cutting using both the push and pull strokes. The teeth are induction hardened. The line is wide, going up to 26-inch, 12-point fine cut saws.

Pax saws, from Thomas Flinn (sold by Lee Valley) in Sheffield, England, are panel saws made to traditional patterns, ground thin towards the back and top of the saw to prevent binding, made of high carbon steel to take an especially sharp edge. The Pax saws are more for the tool enthusiast who also has practical need for such a saw, as their cost is more than triple that of the Stanley saw.

Toolbox saws are among the most useful of the panel saws for the many of us. Toolbox saws have blades short enough to let them fit in a toolbox or toolbag of reasonable size. Overall the saw is seldom more than 20 inches. Such saws force a short, choppy sawing motion. If you anticipate much hand saw work, buy a longer panel saw, with a 22- to 26-inch long blade. Sawing motion is easier and smoother. In deeper cuts, a

These two backsaws have a rib along the back to keep the blade very rigid for precise cuts.

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smoother action helps prevent binding. Folding saws are extremely handy in toolboxes, including folding Japanese and pruning saws.

Backsaws are handy when you need precise cuts, whether for depth or angle. A rib along the back of the saw keeps the blade very rigid. With little or no flex at the teeth, the cut can be very precise. Backsaws are usually seen today with miter boxes, but are available in versions for free-hand work, plus dovetail and tenon versions for finer woodworking.

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MAKING A CUT

Starting a handsaw cut is simple. Use your left thumb knuckle—I'm right-handed, so change hands if needed—to guide the saw blade as you push it for the first few inches of the stroke. Some people use the tip of their index finger to guide the start. Whichever way you select, start smoothly, with as little force as possible to prevent the saw jumping and cutting your knuckle or finger tip.

Backsaws often come with miter boxes.

Begin the cut by guiding the blade with your thumb or finger as you push the first few inches.

Then cut with the saw teeth held at about a 45-degree angle to the work surface. Push, pull, and keep the strokes as straight and smooth as you can. As with all physical work, practice helps. Great power isn't needed.

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Continue cutting at a 45-degree angle, keeping the strokes as straight as possible.

Starting a cut with a Japanese pattern saw or a Stanley Sharptooth is even simpler. Place the teeth at the line, and draw the saw to you. The saw cuts on the pull stroke, making it easier to start than the European-pattern saw that most of us are used to. Japanese saws have thinner saw blades than European saws. Even on a pull stroke, these blades flex more, needing attention so the cut doesn't wander. Japanese rip saws are a wonder, while the very fine-toothed crosscut saws—as many as 25 tpi—produce incredibly smooth cuts. They're preferred by many who do fine woodworking because of the very fine kerf (saw cut slot) they make, plus the smooth finish in the cut. Many versions are available, including backsaws, rip and crosscut versions.

OTHER HANDSAWS

Pruning shears run out of *oomph* at less than 1-1/2 inches, but a good pruning saw, whether the bow saw type or any of the others, continues going until the branch to be removed is much thicker. If you think about chainsaw use for thicker branches, don't. Using a chainsaw overhead is extremely dangerous. You also need to get the saw, the bar oil, the gas mix all ready. Get the saw running. Carry the poundage out to the trees. With a good pruning saw, you pluck it off its nail on the wall, go to the work and start.

Bow saws are good for cutting firewood, when you only need a few small logs.

Utility saws, such as hacksaws are useful, too. When cutting metal, or material other than some of the softer aluminum alloys that are readily cut with fine-toothed handsaws, a hacksaw is a must-have. It cuts plastic or iron pipe, cable bar stock, angle iron or sheet metal (to a limited depth), with equal facility. Hacksaw blades have fine teeth with thin blades. Most often, hacksaw blades have no fewer than 12 tpi, even one used for bar stock. Many run up to 32 tpi. The rule of thumb says at least

Shown are three Japanese-pattern saws.

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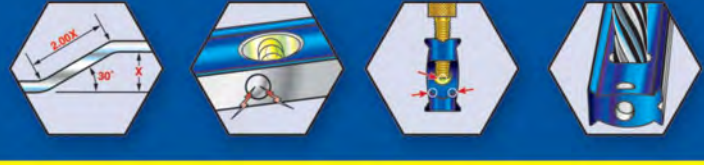

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three teeth in the work when starting a cut with a hacksaw. Hacksaw cuts are begun at a much lower angle than are those made with a panel or backsaw, roughly between 10 and 15 degrees, so more teeth tend to meet the work.

The hacksaw was sometimes called the plumber's saw, because it was used for slicing through nails met as holes and passageways were cut for pipe, while also being ready to cut the pipe. Today, it's that and much more, with carbide-coated and carbide rod blades for materials such as ceramics and glass. Special steel blades make cutting in stressed positions easier—the blades don't break as easily. Most of the blades are cheap, and changeover is easier than ever on newer saws.

When trimming tree limbs, begin with an undercut.

Jab saws are for opening up a wall and cutting out a spot for a fixture, electrical box or similar needs. There are many versions, but Stanley's folding pocket saw (15-333) is a prime example. The handle is large and comfortable. The saw blade works over a wide range because it is made for reciprocating saws. A fine-cut version comes with the saw, to cut metal, plastics, wood and drywall. Many blade types are available at low cost. Jab saws replaced the old keyhole saw. They work better on more materials, last longer and are easier to carry around.

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Flush cut saws are thin-bladed saws allowing an easy flush-to-the-work-surface cut by a blade that doesn't damage the under-surface. Lee Valley's Veritas flush cut saw offers 22 tpi, with teeth set only on one side. That leaves the smooth side down, so the surface underneath isn't marked. Most Japanese flush cut saws use blades with no set at all. Either way works. Blades are short, very flexible, and tough. The saws are useful for trimming anything when the remaining surface must be unmarked, such as dowels, trim, cleaning up tenons in woodwork and so on.

THE BASIC SAW TOOL BOX

Tool boxes around the home are best kept as small as possible, growing only when a need is established for a new tool. Start small, with a short, medium (10 tpi) panel saw, a hacksaw and extra blades with 18 tpi and 24 tpi. Add a jab saw, preferably a folding model.

After that, consider long panel saws for easier, more accurate cuts. Add a backsaw and miter box as needed for accurate cross-cuts for molding and other uses. Add flush cut and other saws as the needs arise.

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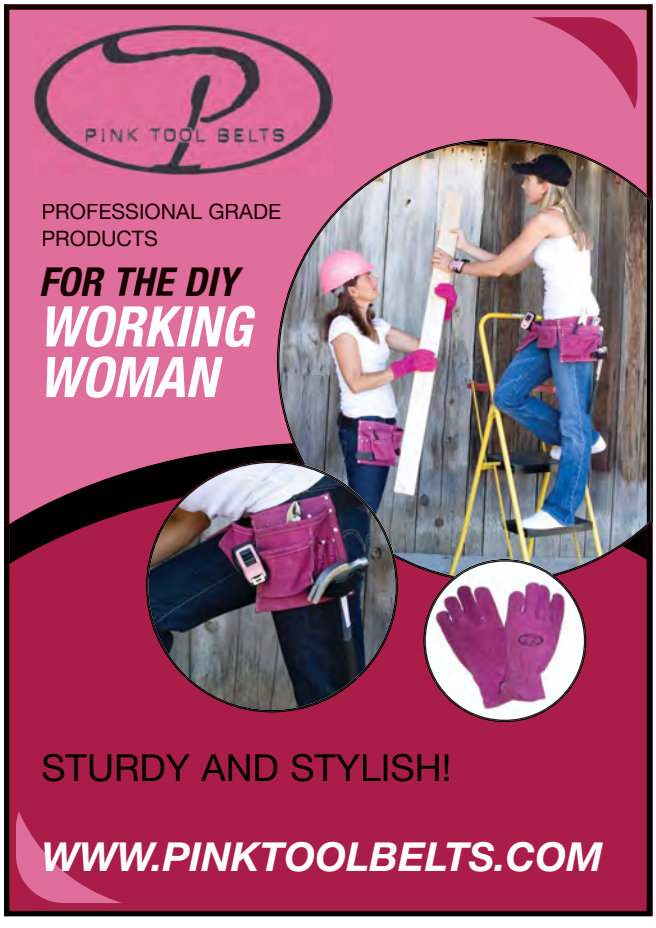

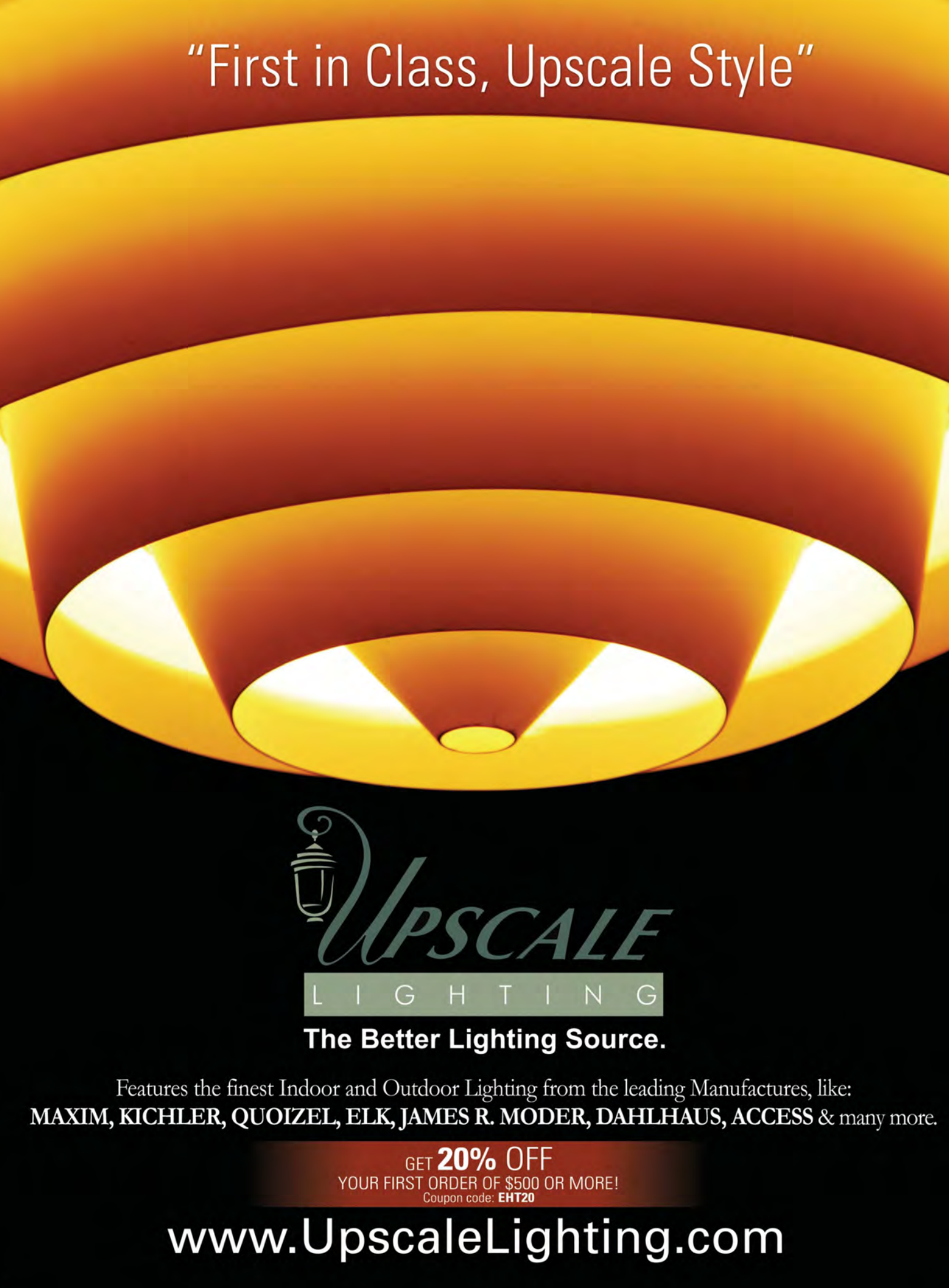
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For yard work, look for a good pruning saw. Get a bow saw for heavier work. Bow saws are preferable because of their replaceable blades, a handy feature when cutting wood that may be a dried plum tree or green hackberry on the same day.

At that point, stop and think carefully before adding any more handsaws. **EHT**

Shown above are two "specialty" saws, a hacksaw (top) and a folding jab saw.

Shown left, the Veritas flush cut saw exhibits a high degree of blade flexibility (www.leevalley.com).

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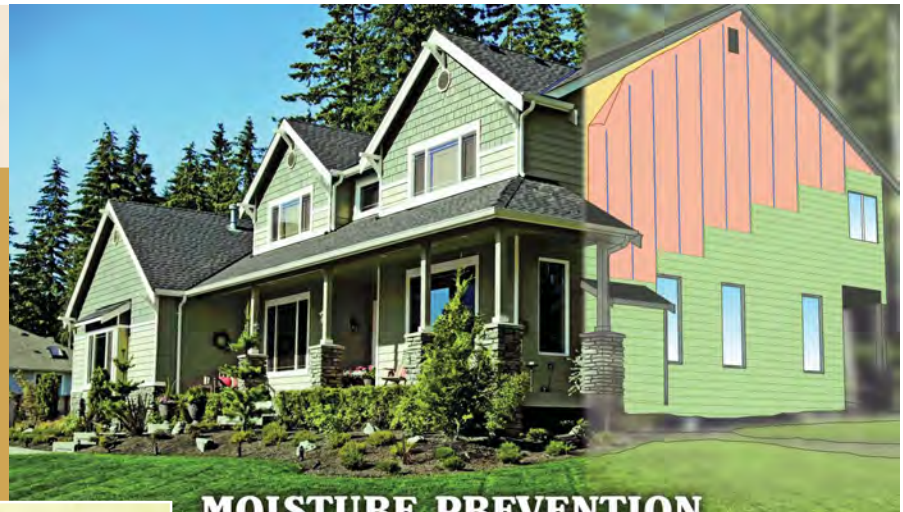

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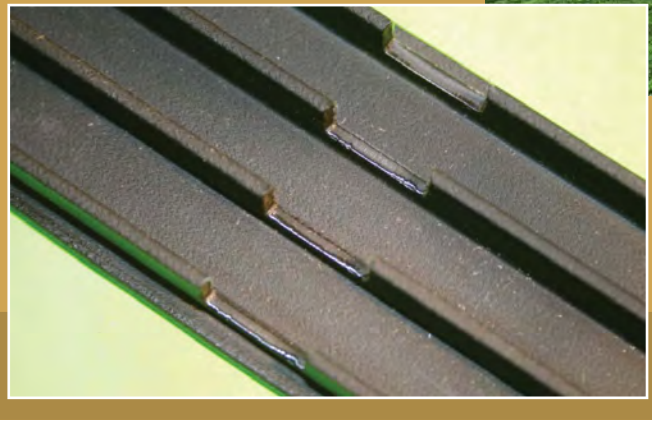

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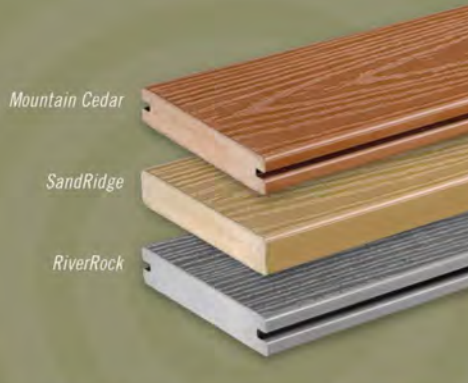

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The Fun and Fascination of Wallpaper

Wallpaper or wallcovering, in a myriad of patterns, colors, and textures, provide a means of setting the décor of any room. Probably the biggest problem is choosing from the almost unlimited varieties available.

By Monte Burch

Nothing sets the décor of a room like wallpaper, or the more correct term, wallcovering. Wallcovering is available in a myriad of colors, patterns, and textures. You can spend hours looking at just a small portion of the sample books in a Lowe's or other big box store, not to mention the specialty wallpaper stores or online. Many of these sample books offer mix-and-match coordinated papers, colors and patterns. This also includes thousands of border samples to set off your wallpaper.

It's important to carefully choose a pattern and/or color to suit your furniture style as well as the size and shape of the room. Small, subdued patterns are best for smaller rooms or a quiet retreat. Bold patterns work in larger rooms, and rooms without a lot of cut-up surfaces, ins and outs of the walls, as well as lots of doors and windows. Wallpaper can also be used as wainscoting, or a wallpaper border can accent the ceiling or wainscoting for painted walls. The type of wallpaper chosen also depends on the surface of the walls. Smooth walls will take almost any wallpaper material; rougher walls are best with textured papers.

CALCULATION

Once you get past the monumental task of picking out the paper and border, the actual chore of hanging wallpaper is a fairly simple do-it-yourself chore, especially with today's new coverings, adhesives and tools. Most papers these days are "self-adhesive," requiring only water to adhere them to the walls.

The first task is to determine how much wallpaper you will need. Wallpaper may be sold as double or triple rolls; the label should indicate the number of square feet. Wallpaper patterns must be "matched" on the seams and some patterns require more adjustment for matching, resulting in more waste. The label should also state the "match" or pattern repeat.

To get a rough estimate, measure the length and width of the room and double the figure. Measure the ceiling height and multiply this measurement by the total length of the walls. This will give you the total square footage of the walls. Divide this number by the square footage on the rolls of wallpaper you choose, and this will give you the number of rolls needed. It's a good idea, however to purchase an extra roll for insurance. If the roll is not opened and is not special ordered, you can usually take it back. It's also a good idea to take your measurement figures

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to the salesperson where you purchase the paper. They can usually help in determining the amount of wallpaper needed. They can also help in determining the amount and types of wall preparation, adhesive products and tools needed. Make sure all the rolls of wallpaper are from the same batch or lot.

PREPARATION

The next step is wall preparation. Wallpaper doesn't require as much wall prep as painting, but the more you do to prepare the wall, the easier the papering chore and the better the results. Wallpaper adheres best on a clean, smooth surface. Using a soft rag, wash the walls with ammonia and water mixture and allow the walls to dry thoroughly.

Replacing wallpaper is a fairly easy do-it-yourself chore, if you have the right tools, and follow basic steps.

Repair any cracks and remove loose paint and any high points or old paint drips to prevent bumps under your new wallpaper. Fill all nail holes or indentions with spackle. Sand all cracks and spackle these areas smooth. The amount of wall prep required

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Zinsser offers a wide variety of specialty wallcovering tools that take a lot of the hassle out of removing old wallcoverings. And make it easier to hang new.

also depends on the type of wall. A new gypsum board or Sheetrock wall requires sizing or a primer. A flat, painted wall usually doesn't require more than cleaning and patching. A glossy, painted wall will also require sizing or priming. Zinsser Shieldz Universal Pre-Wallcovering Primer not only creates a good surface for hanging any type of wallpaper, it helps the wallpaper go on easier, and it also makes it easier to remove when it's time to redecorate.

If the walls have old wallpaper, it should be removed before applying the new. Removing wallpaper is not complicated, but it can be a messy and tiresome job on old walls with more than one layer

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Old wallpaper should first be removed. Some wallpaper can simply be peeled off.

of paper. Zinsser has a number of products making this formidable chore much easier, including their Paper Tiger scoring tool, DIF wallpaper remover, WalWorks stripper roller and Paper Scraper wallpaper remover/scraper. The first step in removing is to lay down some plastic sheeting on the floor, then test the wallpaper to determine the removal process.

If the wallpaper only tears in small pieces, perforate it with the Paper Tiger scoring tool. Don't do this too hard, or you can create perforations in the wallboard. Use just enough pressure to perforate the paper. Zinsser DIF is available as a liquid concentrate or a ready to use gel stripper. A 22-ounce bottle of concentrate with patented enzymes and wetting agents makes enough to remove wall-

Other paper may be harder to remove. The first step is to score the old paper with a Zinsser Paper Tiger Scoring Tool. The more holes you make, the faster and easier the paper will come off.

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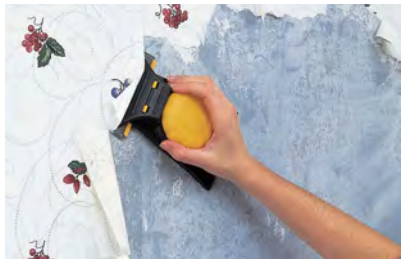
covering in a large 12-by-24-foot room. Ready-to-use, non-drip DIF Gel clings to the wall, eliminating the mess and works great on hard-to-remove wallcoverings. Saturate the paper with the gel. The more stripper you get on the paper, the easier the paper is to lift off. Allow the stripper to work 15 to 20 minutes before scraping off the old wallpaper. The stripping gel is best applied with the WalWorks stripper roller. It holds more stripper than a paint roller, and the straight end allows it to be used next to ceilings and corners for better coverage. If the vinyl front of the wallpaper pulls off, leaving a paper backing, merely reapply the stripper.

You're now ready to scrape off

Then, starting at the top, apply a wallpaper stripper, such as Zinsser DIF Liquid Concentrate or DIF Ready-to-Use Gel using a WalWorks Adhesive & Stripper Roller.



Allow the stripper to work for about 20 minutes, and then use a scraper to remove the loosened paper. The Zinsser Paper Scraper Wallpaper Remover and Wall Scraper has an angled blade and large handle, allowing you to scrape off stubborn sections of paper without damage to the wall surface.

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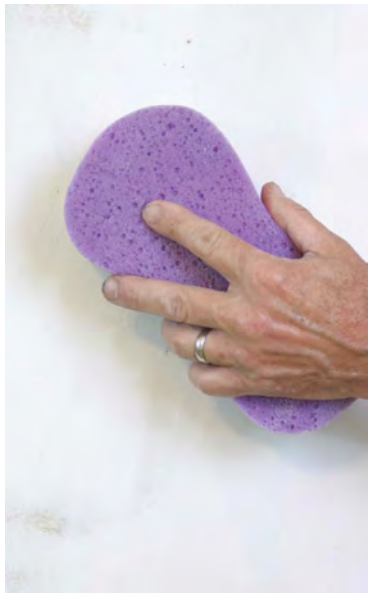
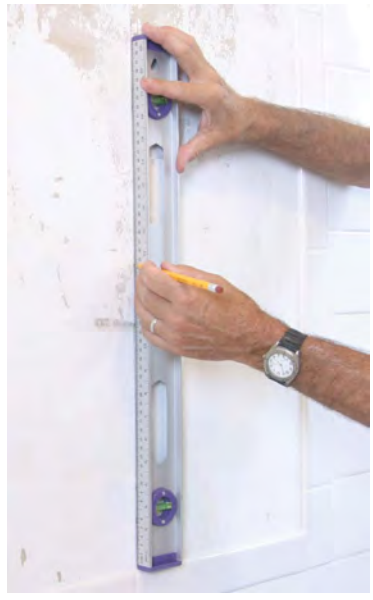
the loosened wallpaper. Paint scrapers, putty knives and razor-edged scrapers are often used for this task but they can dig-in and gouge the wall surface. The Zinsser Paper Scraper holds the scraping blade at the perfect angle for scraping without damaging the wall. And, the large handle makes it easy to use. Once all paper has been removed, wash the walls with clean water and a sponge. Then patch any cracks, gouges or holes with spackle. Clean up the mess and you're ready for the fun.

APPLICATION

Gather the tools and materials needed. Wallpaper and borders come prepasted, and these must be wetted in a



After the wallpaper has been removed, wash off excess glue and clean the walls with a damp sponge.



Using a level or plumb line to establish a plumb line on the wall, starting at one corner.

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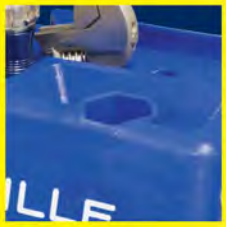

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water or Prep tray. Zinsser Prepz one-step border/wallpaper prep and adhesive makes it easier to position paper during the hanging process, improves adhesive performance and eliminates the messy water tray. You'll need a large table to work with the paper. A folding, plastic-topped utility table is great for this chore. Other tools needed include: plumb bob and line, level, paste brush, scissors, utility knife, a tray and a smoothing brush or device such as the WalWiz 3-in-1 Wallpapering Tool.

The next step is to plan your papering. In most instances the walls may not be an exact measurement of multiples of the paper width. The best method is to start at one corner of the room, and if a door is involved, it's even better to start next to or over the top of the door. If you start in the center of the wall, when you get around the room, you may have to cut the paper roll to a different width, cutting into the pattern. The beginning and ending usually won't match,

Roll the paper out on a long table and measure for length, adding for the top and bottom.

so it's best to start in the least noticeable corner of the room.

Carefully measure the wall and cut the wallpaper to length, allowing a 2- to 3-inch overlap at the ceiling or ceiling molding and floor molding or baseboard. To begin, cut the first and second pieces, matching the pattern and allowing any extra length needed for the second piece. Mark each piece with a T for the top edge unless the paper has an easily recognized up and down pattern. Measure about 1 inch to one side of the least noticeable corner (say behind the door) and mark a plumb line using a level or plumb bob and chalkline.

Even if you are hanging prepasted wallpaper, use Prepz One Step Wallpaper Prep & Adhesive. Prepz eliminates water trays, special adhesives, activators and the need for sizing in one easy step. Brush or roll it on the back of half the length of the cut wallpaper piece, and then fold the wallpaper back to itself (paste to paste), which is called "booking." Continue to apply Prepz to the

Cut the paper to the correct length with scissors after using a straightedge and pencil to mark for the cut.

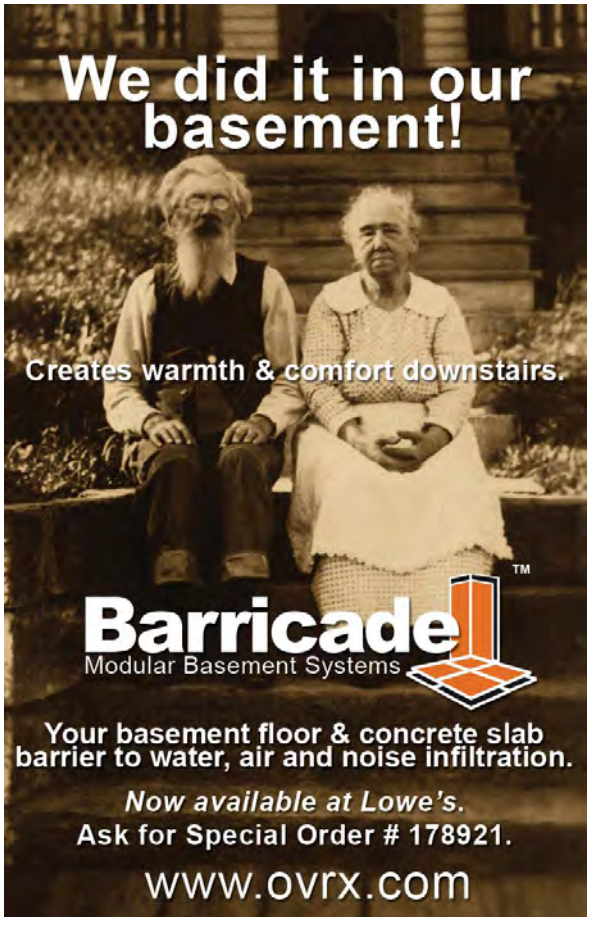
Prepasted paper can be immersed in a tray, to wet the adhesive, and then hung.

It's best, however, to use an additional adhesive, such as Zinsser PREPZ One Step Wallpaper Prep and Adhesive. Apply with a brush or roller, then fold the wallpaper back to itself (paste-to-paste), and continue to apply to the remainder of the strip.

balance of the strip. Now you're ready to hang.

Holding the wallpaper up against the wall, align the paper edge with the plumb line and apply to the wall, overlapping the ceiling molding 2 to 3 inches. Let the bottom end hang loose to make sure you position the paper strip accurately. Once you have the paper positioned properly, starting at the top, lightly smooth out the paper.

When you reach the folded portion, unfold a little at a time and continue smoothing, making sure the edge meets the plumb line. Cut the third strip of wallpaper to the correct length, matching the pattern to the second strip with enough to meet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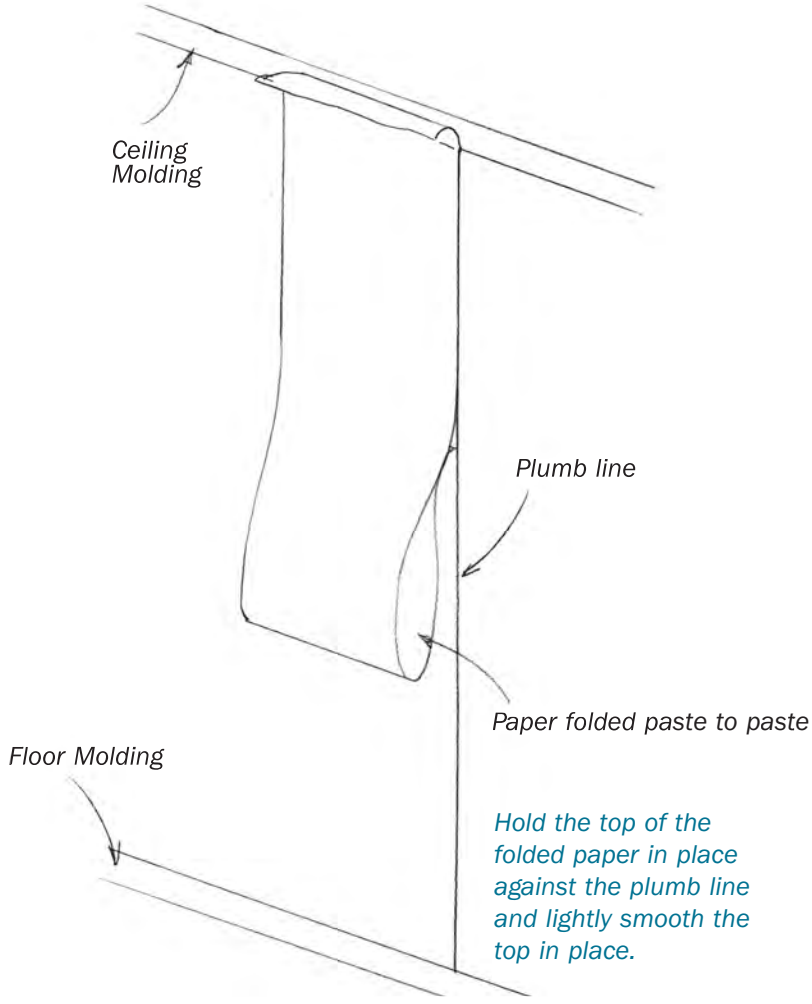
and extend top and bottom before hanging the second strip. Smooth the second strip, making sure the seam meets properly and is smoothed out.

Trim the top and bottom using the trimming knife and 3-in-1 tool, using the WalWiz as a sliding guide. Hold it firmly at an angle and position it between the wallpapered surface and the cutting blade. Then slide the trimming knife cutting blade along with the guide as you cut. Again wipe away excess paste with a sponge and clean water. Match and cut the fourth strip before hanging the third and so forth. Before you know it, you will have easily hung your new wallpaper by yourself. Note; if the wallpaper has no match, all pieces could be measured and cut at one



Hold the top of the folded paper in place against the plumb line and lightly smooth the top in place.

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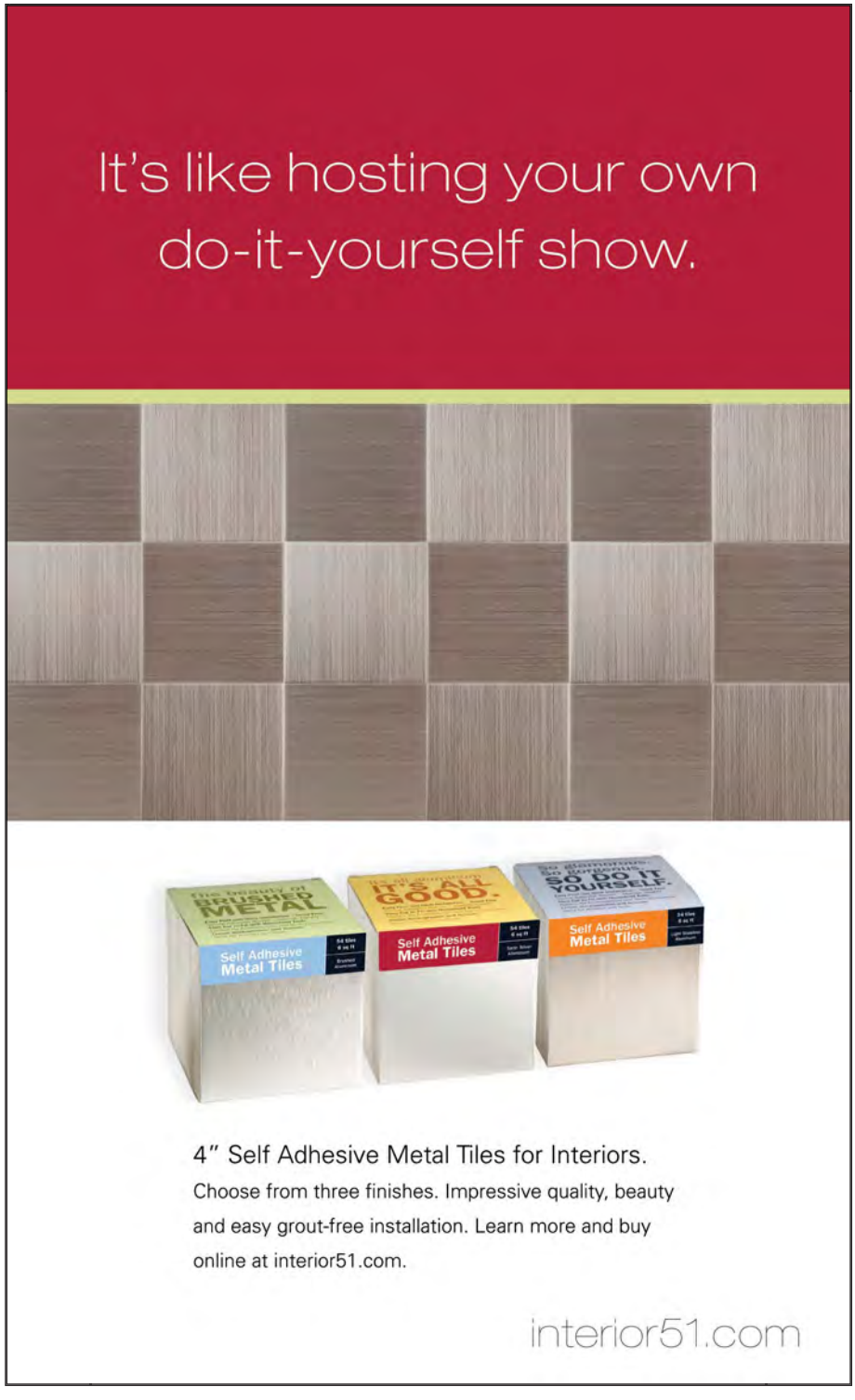
time. Be sure to mark the top of each strip, even on wallpaper with a vertical stripe.

HEAD FOR THE BORDER

Wallpaper border can be used over wallpaper or paint. Be sure to use the border paste recommended by the manufacturer and follow the manufacturer's instructions, or use Prepz. Rolls of border are usually 15 feet in length and from 4 to 12 inches in width. Again, make sure all rolls are from the same lot. As with wallpaper, start the border in the least noticeable corner of the room as the end will seldom match the beginning. As with wallpaper, book the border by folding paste against paste. Unlike wallpaper, it will take two people and two ladders or step stools to hang border. Zinsser says a border can be put up by one person by attaching the border with one hand and holding the remainder of the booked

Then smooth the remainder of the strip in place against the plumb line using a tool such as the Zinsser WalWiz 3-in-1 wallpaper tool.

Trim around molding, doors and windows using the 3-in-1 tool as a guide for a knife.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border in the other. But it has always taken two people and two ladders for us.

Start with two ladders about 2 feet apart with one person starting the border in the corner and the other person holding the rest of the booked border. When the person on the first ladder has attached as much border as they can reach, their ladder is moved to the other side and they take the booked border while the second person adheres the border area they can reach. Continue leap-frogging the ladders until you complete the border. At the end of each 15-foot strip, go back and wipe clean while using the WalWiz to make sure that section of border is firmly in place. Note: Border is printed in a repeating pattern and therefore each roll of border doesn't start and end in the same place. In other words,

Before hanging the first strip of wallpaper, match the pattern for the second strip. Match the pattern for the third strip before hanging the second. Continue in this manner.

Shown is a wallpaper pattern with a distinct horizontal match. Other patterns have a more subtle match.

Wallpaper can also be used as a "wainscoting". A laser level can be used to establish a level line around the room.

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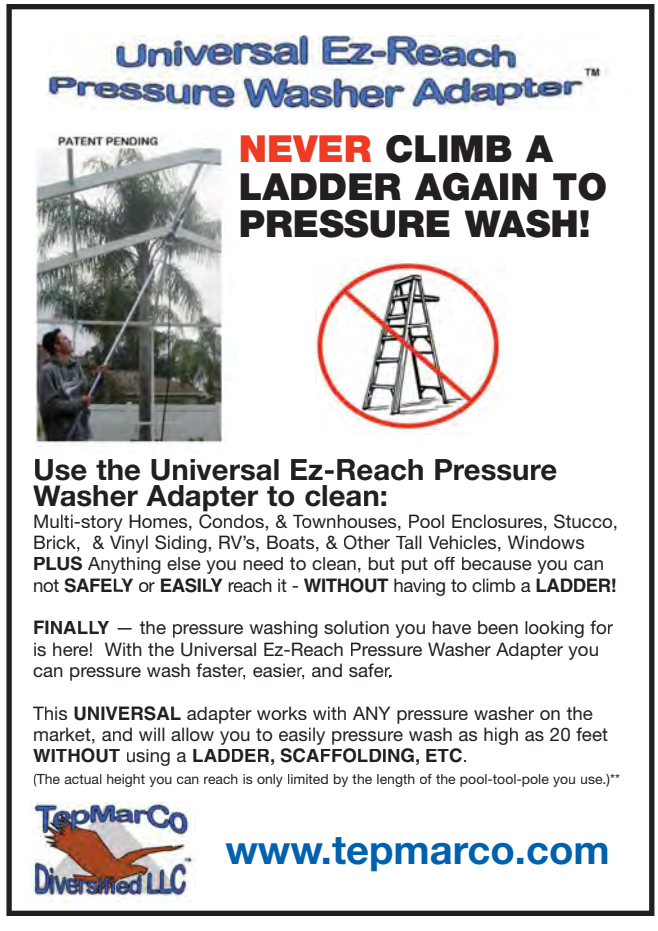
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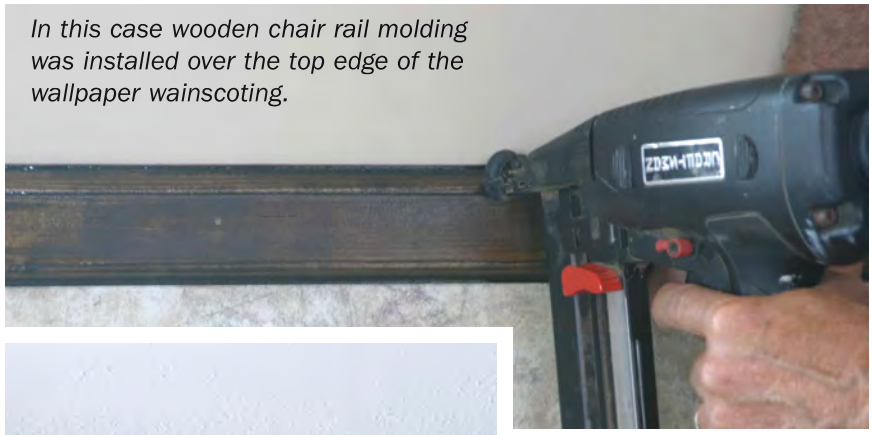
Or a level can be used to establish the level line.

there can also be some waste with borders. Always get extra, and like wallpaper, any unopened packages can usually be returned.

Finally, sit back with a cool drink and enjoy your handiwork, you deserve it because wallpapering can be a lot of work. EHT

In this case wooden chair rail molding was installed over the top edge of the wallpaper wainscoting.



Borders can really brighten up a room, set the décor and add lots of design possibilities. They can be installed over painted or papered walls.

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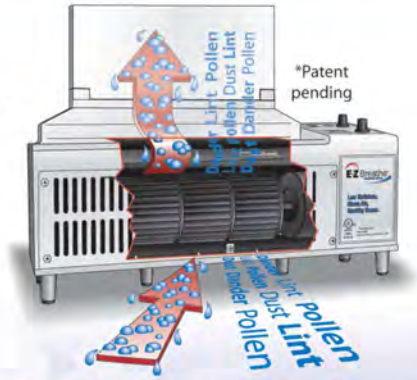

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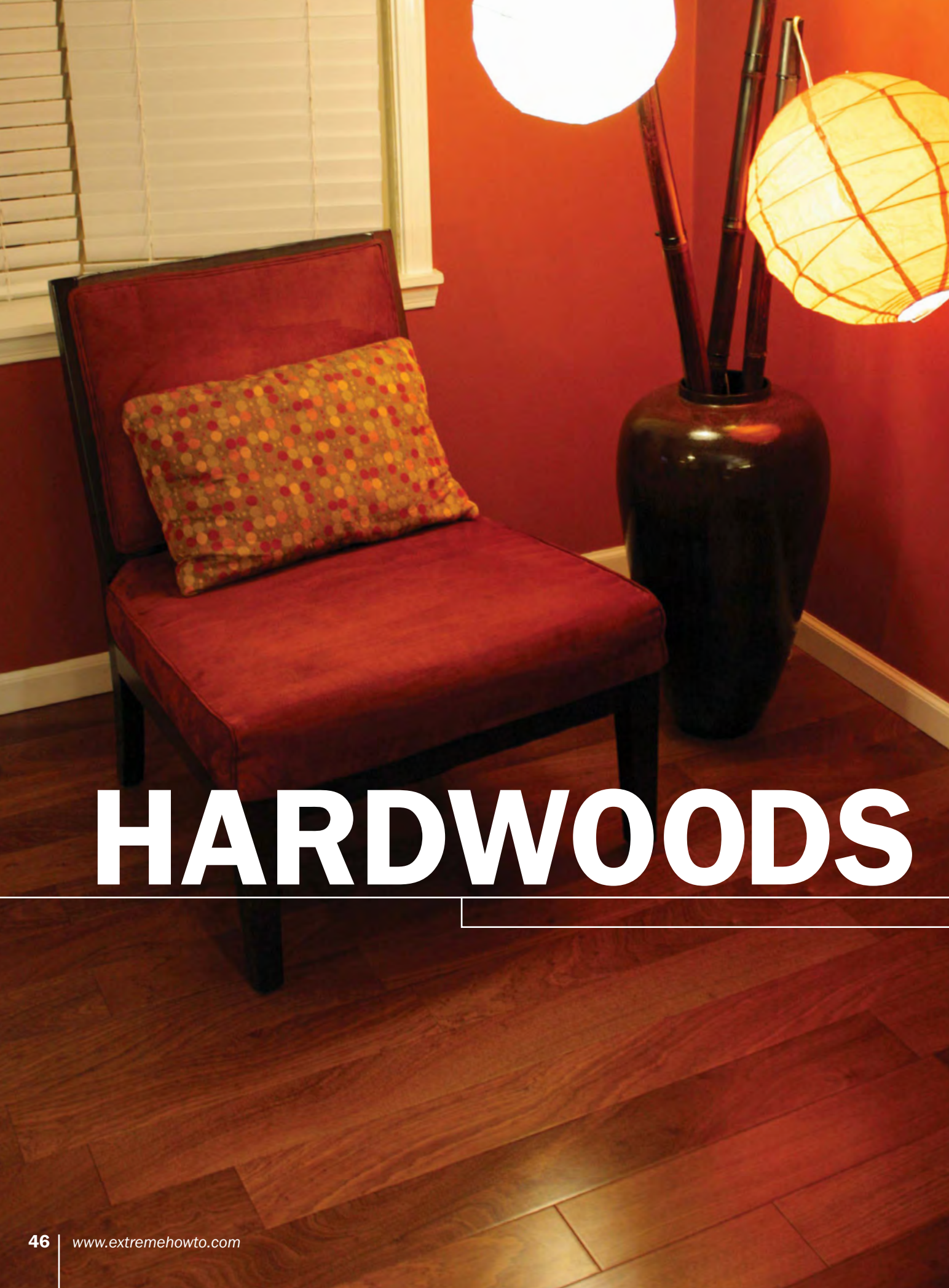
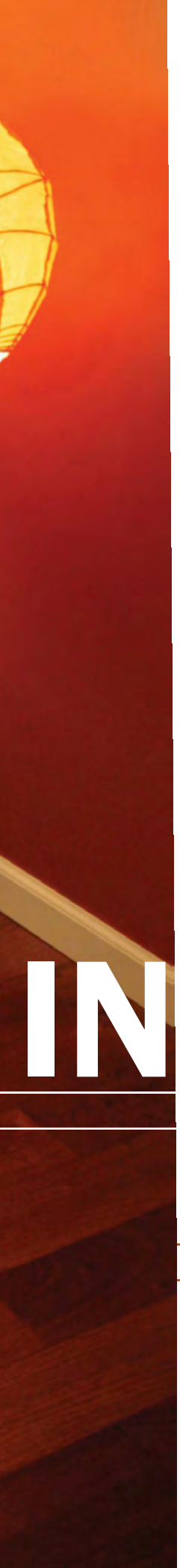


HARDWOODS



IN A HEARTBEAT

Engineered hardwoods offer all the character of solid hardwoods, but installation is quick and easy.

By Matt Weber

From a do-it-yourselfer's perspective, there are two primary factors that determine the material I select for a new project: the quality of the product and its relative ease of installation. When it comes to wood floors, it's my firm belief that engineered hardwoods offer the best of both worlds.

In fact, engineered hardwood floors are a hybrid of laminate flooring and genuine solid hardwoods. Like laminate floors, engineered hardwoods consist of various layers of woodgrains and textures, such as high-density fiberboard. However, standard laminate floors have a printed graphic of wood covered by a hard wear layer as a finished surface. On the other hand, instead of a picture of wood, engineered hardwood floors have a veneer of actual solid hardwood, usually about 1/8-inch thick, that is laminated on top of the flooring planks. This hardwood layer preserves the unique characteristics of the grain, and the floor boards are usually sold pre-finished with a scratch-resistant sealer.

These hybrid floor planks offer the advantages of both source materials. For example, engineered hardwood floors can eventually be sanded and refinished, whereas sanding a laminate floor would ruin the wood graphic and destroy the appearance of the floor. The laminated sub-layers also allow engineered flooring to be manufactured in easy-to-install planks that simply click together with tongue-and-groove joints and "float," meaning no glue or nailing is necessary. Furthermore, solid

HARDWOODS IN A HEARTBEAT

hardwood floor boards wouldn't be structurally stable over concrete subfloors. Concrete contains moisture that would change the integrity of solid wood. However, the various layers of engineered hardwoods make them more moisture-resistant for over-concrete applications. Engineered hardwoods also install with moisture barriers and foam underlayment materials, which provide an extra layer of insulation between the subfloor and the flooring.

A wide variety of manufacturers and suppliers provide solid hardwoods, laminate flooring and engineered hardwoods. After researching the benefits and installation advantages, I selected the Transitions EVO brand of engineered hardwood flooring from BHK of America. The click-together installation combined with rich browns and toasted golds of the Sapele Mahogany finish we selected proved to be the perfect floor for the home I was remodeling. Here's how I completed the project.

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HAVE PLAN IN HAND

Your first step is to lay out a floor plan. Sketch the room on paper and mark the dimensions. Calculate the square footage you'll need, and then order extra to account for unusable cut planks, as well as providing some extra material if damaged planks need to be replaced in the future. Also, make note of the different transitions in the room where the engineered hardwoods will meet other types of flooring or exterior doors. The flooring supplier will usually have transition moldings for these areas.

Once the flooring is on site, allow the unopened cartons of planks to remain in the room where they are to be installed at least 48 hours prior to installation. This allows the flooring to shrink or swell slightly, according to the climate of its new home.

Engineered hardwoods can be installed over most flooring surfaces, but always remove carpeting and remove any wood flooring that is installed over concrete.

Next, make sure the subfloor is clean, dry and level. The planks must fit together correctly

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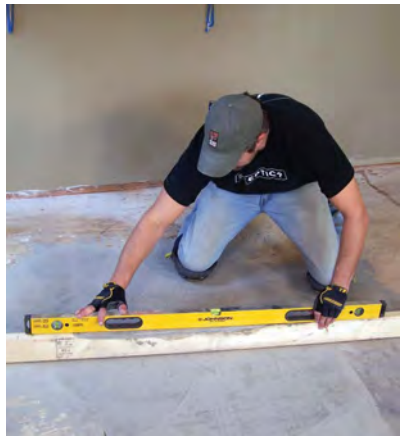
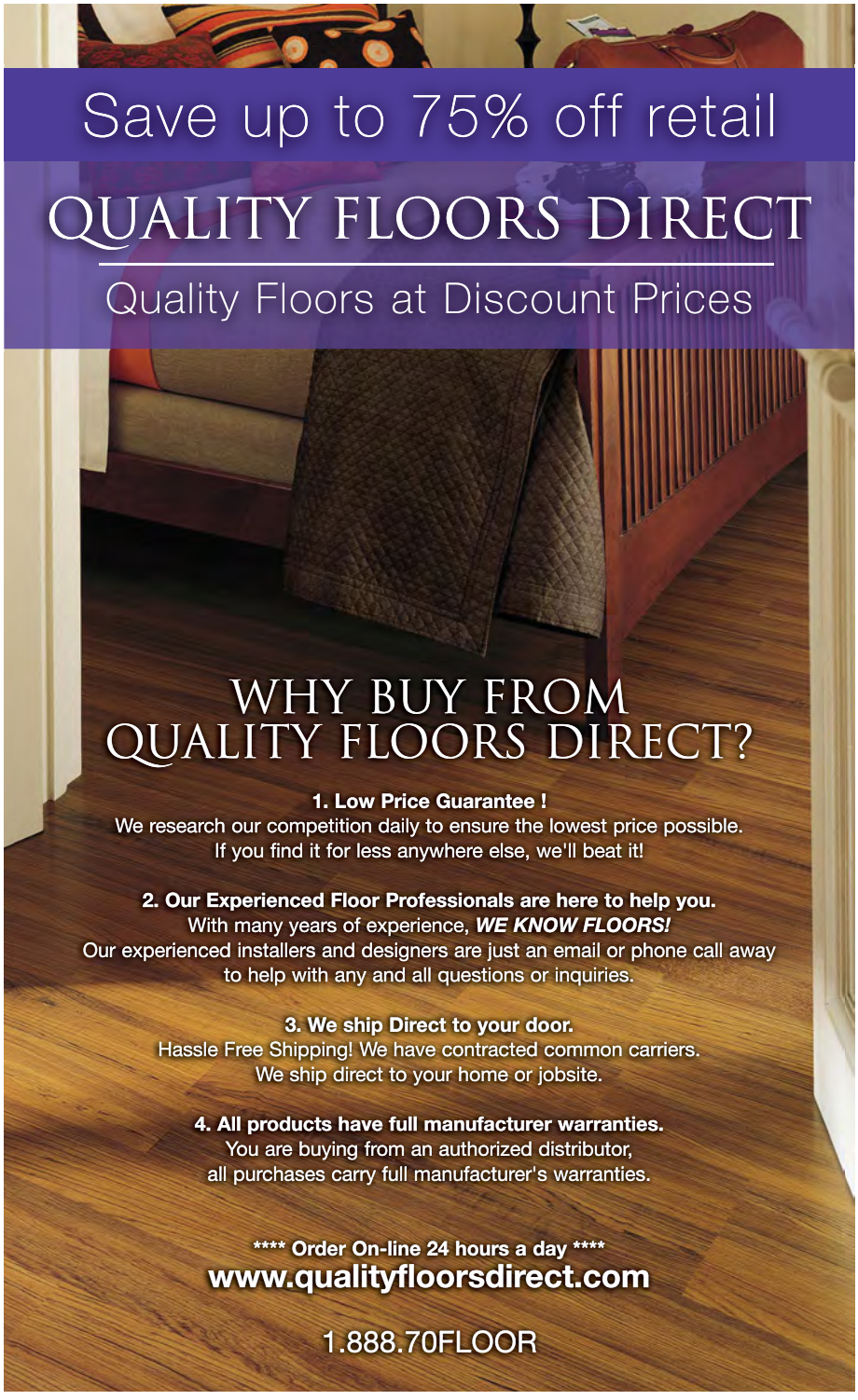
to ensure an even finished surface and a seamless appearance, so a flat subfloor is critical. Check for level with an 8-foot straight-edge laid across the subfloor. Most manufacturers recommend no more than a 3/16-inch difference in height between any two points in a circle with a 20-foot diameter.

If the floor isn't this level, you'll need to fill low spots or grind down high spots before installing the flooring. In this case, I was saddled with both a high and a low spot in the 30-year-old plywood subfloor. I hit the high spots with a large belt sander, and had to use a few batches of a Portland cement-based leveling compound to fill deeper depressions. Mix the floor leveler with water according to the manufacturer's directions and then use a large hand trowel to spread it evenly. It took several coats of leveler to flatten the floor, allowing each coat to dry before applying the next.



Make sure the subfloor is level. The floor shown required a Portland cement-based leveling compound.

Damp floors present another problem for installation. In the project shown, we installed above a finished basement, so we had no moisture problems to worry about. This might not be the case with a concrete slab, so make sure the subsurface is dry. Check the moisture content of concrete floors by taping the edges of a 2-foot polyethylene square over the concrete. After 24 hours, if no signs of moisture buildup or discoloration appear beneath the plastic, the floor is probably dry enough. Otherwise, seal it.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PREP STEPS

Prior to installing, remove any existing base trim along the walls. Because the flooring will expand and contract due to changes in humidity, the planks aren't installed tightly against the walls of any room. You'll need to leave a 1/4-inch gap against the wall around the edges of the flooring to allow for the expansion. The spacing must be maintained at every wall in the room. Once the flooring is completely installed, base moulding and/or quarter-round can be reinstalled over the edges to conceal the gap.

As long as the subfloor is exposed, take the opportunity to detect any floor squeaks and eliminate them with extreme prejudice—you'll kick yourself later if you don't. Dance around the room if you have to, but find every problem area and drive a 3-inch screw through the subfloor and tightly into the joist below, until your floor squeaks no more.

Next step: Undercut the doorjambs and casing to allow room for the thickness of the new flooring. A pull saw works for this job, enabling you to get close to the floor to make the cuts. You can also rent an electric jamb saw, a spiral saw equipped with a flush-cut attachment or one of the new oscillating tools on the market. Determine the required depth of undercut by stacking a scrap of flooring on top of a piece of foam-cushion underlayment and using it as a saw guide, representing a small, workable sample of the final installed floor. Leave an additional 1/4-inch of space concealed beneath the doorframe to allow expansion.

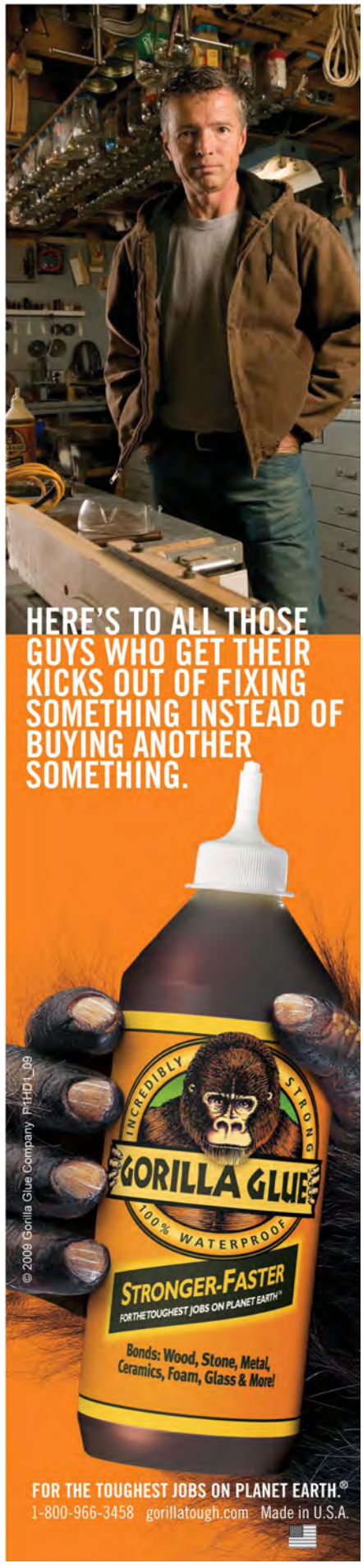
On concrete subfloors, use 6-millimeter polyethylene film as a moisture barrier. Create an 8-inch overlap to join sheets of film when covering the subfloor. The film is needed over all subfloors that contain concrete, even if the concrete is covered with vinyl, linoleum tile or other type of flooring. Since I was on plywood, I skipped the moisture barrier and went straight to the underlayment.

Engineered wood floors require a foam underlayment to provide extra comfort and noise reduction. Some brands of flooring even have underlayment attached to the underside of each plank. For this job, it came in a roll. Cover the subfloor with underlayment to the edge of the wall, butting the edges and securing the seams with duct tape. Make cutouts in the underlayment to clear any floor vents.

Unroll the foam underlayment and join the butted seams with duct tape.

LAYING THE FLOOR

Before beginning the plank installation, measure the width of the room to make sure the last row of flooring will be at least 2 inches wide. Divide the width of the room by the width of the exposed face of the flooring. The remaining number will be the width of the last row. If the last row is less than 2 inches, rip the first row of boards narrower to allow more room for the last.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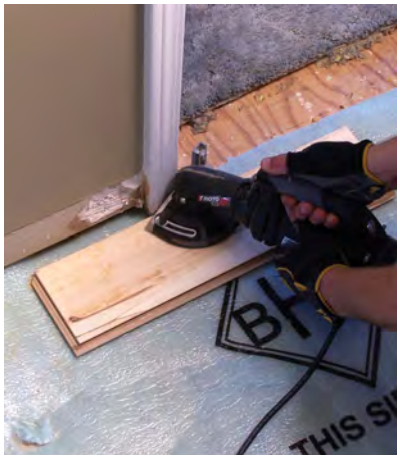

Undercut any door jambs or other trim that might interfere with the flooring installaion.

If you're working with floor boards that all measure a standard length, then I suggest laying out a "dry run" of planks to make sure you don't have a tiny sliver of flooring at either end of the room. However, the Transitions EVO line from BHK is a flooring system that consists of floor boards of various precut lengths. This allows you to install random lengths to stagger the joints, and you can then decide which length works best at the end of each row.

I then assembled the first three row of planks with the tongues facing the wall. (The Transitions EVO planks have two tongues, one on the side and one on the end.) I assembled the first rows a few feet away from the wall to give myself a little working room. I found that the planks were easiest to install by joining the long tongue-and-groove joints first, then following with the shorter joint on the end. The best method is to hold the "groove board" flat while you insert the tongue of the joining board at an angle. Then bend the tongue board downward, which pulls the tongue into the groove. It helps to use a hammer and rubber block to tap the joints securely in place. I progressed down the room, assembling the first three rows together. The random lengths of the floor boards made it easy to select a plank that would offset the joints from row to row.

Note: An extra worker is always a huge help during installation, but I had no such luck. If you're installing the floor alone, I suggest using a box of flooring to weigh down the previously installed floor boards as you move down the first three rows. The weight of the box will hold them securely to the floor, so they don't separate as you hammer-tap the new planks in position.

At the ends of the rows, you might get lucky and have one of the random lengths fit precisely into the space against the wall. More likely, you'll need to cut the plank to length, using a handheld circular saw, table saw, miter saw or even handsaw. (To get the most mileage from my materials, I typically would use the remainder of the cutoff piece to begin the next row.)

With the first three rows assembled, I placed plastic 1/4-inch spacers against the wall to allow for expansion, and pushed the three rows in place against it. When all locked in place at the joints, the weight and rigidity of the combined three rows has enough structural integrity to assemble the following rows without using the box full of

Begin the layout with a dry run of loose planks to plan your first three rows.

flooring to weigh down the assembled floor.

At this point you can really get the ball rolling, assembling row by row, plank by plank, using the spacers against all wall transitions. A hammer and rubber block will be your handiest tool until you reach the ends of the flooring rows. At that point you don't have clearance to "push" or hammer-tap the final plank in place. Instead, use a pull bar to hook the end of the plank against the wall, and hammer tap the striking plate on the pull bar to inch the plank into the row and fasten the tongue-and-groove joint.

In some cases, you'll need a jigsaw for making small cutouts, such as rectangular cuts around floor registers. For small, round

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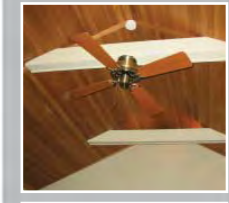

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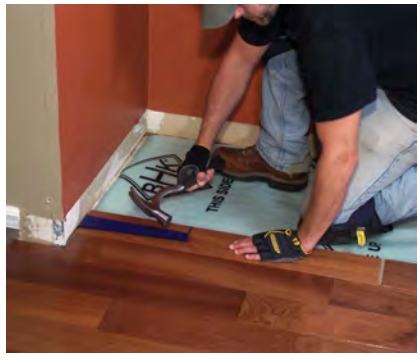

cutouts around pipes, a drill and a hole-saw set might be useful. And, you may be saddled with a final row of flooring that must be thinner than a standard board length to fit against the wall. To rip the board to width, use a table saw and rip fence or a handheld circular saw equipped with an edge guide.

BHK offers matching floor transitions to nail in place along the bottom of doors where the engineered hardwoods meet other types of flooring. Just cut them to length and nail them flush between the floors for a sleek, finished appearance.

The end result of the finished floor was a stunning change to the décor of the home. The warm tones and natural grain of the genuine sapele were

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absolutely beautiful, and I completed the entire installation—approximately 400 square feet—all by myself over the course of a couple of days. I couldn't be happier with the finished product and would recommend this flooring to any homeowner who wants to do it themselves, and do it right. **EHT**

Editor's Note: *Special Thanks to BHK of America for supporting this project. Visit www.bhkofamerica.com.*

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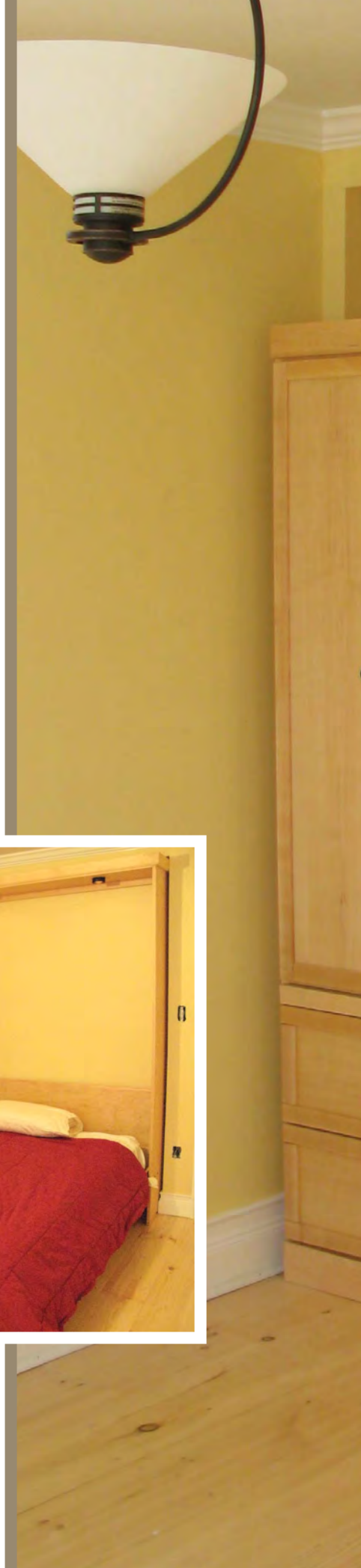
FOLD AWAY HIDE AWAY

An “above the fold” bedroom upgrade.

By Mark Clement



“Above the fold,” I learned a few years ago, is something that merits extra attention.

The “fold” being referenced is the fold of a newspaper. Something above it, and therefore seen first, is taken to be more important, interesting, or otherwise meritorious of our attention.

Well, I’m hijacking that phrase and repurposing it to describe a home-improvement project I’ve recently completed—one that folds away, no less. It’s a Murphy bed—or wall-bed—and now that it’s in, this furniture-grade upgrade gets and deserves a lot of attention in my house.

When my wife and I designed the room (our son’s room; he’ll be just a few months old when you read this … please wire your cash gifts to my Grand Cayman account; thank you in advance), we knew we would like the wall-bed. As designed, we knew it would enable us to optimize the space in the room. But now that this bad boy is in, it’s 10 times better than we expected—now there’s a good deal.

And, while I customized the room to accommodate the bed, installing the bed unit itself, manufactured by The Old Creek Wall Bed Factory, proved fast and fun. Let's get to it.

DESIGN

The Old Creek Wallbed Factory (www.wallbedfactory.com) where we got our bed, has several finishes to choose from. We selected the clear maple in the Mission style. It's sleek, slick profile and crisp, classic lines fit nicely with the room's color and decor. The muted, but classic wood grain gives us design options in the future, like repainting some years hence.

Because our boy is the youngest, his room is also our designated guest room, so when Grandma comes to visit, he gets the boot and she gets a refined place to lay her head. We also included a maple side-tower, or cabinet, that matches the bed's trim package. Here, of course, we can store not only his things but bedding and the like, thereby maximizing limited space attractively.

Making Sure It Fits. A queen size bed worked best for our space, and that's what we ordered. The key piece of design information related to bed size is this: Make sure it fits into—and through—your house.

Get organized early. Make sure all the hardware that's supposed to be included is there. Then place it all in an accessible—but out of the way—location so you can get to it later. I like to remove all this stuff from the little plastic bags first, so when I need them I can simply grab them.

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Carefully pry the e-clips from the rod on the side panel using a flat head screwdriver (unlike some e-clips I've wrestled with, these actually come off without an epic battle). Place them carefully where you can reach them. Knocking one down a floor vent by mistake is frustrating.

The tray (the compartment in which the mattress rests) is a very large single piece. You must be certain it not only gets through your doors en route to the final resting place, but up stairs, around landings, and through all the hallways involved in moving the furniture. It's bigger than the mattress that will rest on it, and doesn't bend around corners or squeeze to get through low ceiling clearances like mattresses do.

If your house is undergoing the kind of remodel as mine, then the shortest distance between two points might be a straight line—like straight up through the floor joists. First floor to second: straight shot. If you really do this (I did), then wrap the rough-opening in the floor/ceiling with carpet samples to protect the tray's face-side.

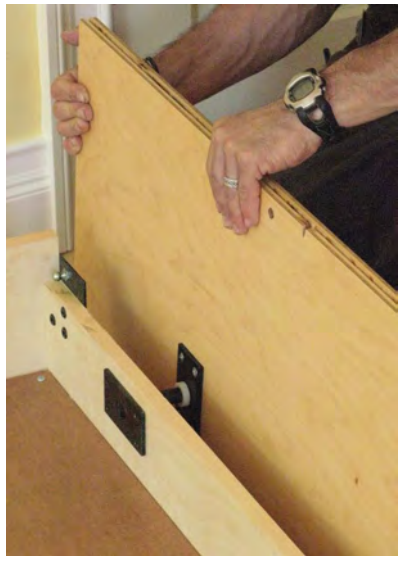
By the way, the tray is heavy. Having some muscle on hand will help move it and minimize the risk of damaging it.

Taking Delivery. My wall bed was delivered by common carrier, i.e. a tractor trailer. That meant I not only needed to be home when it came, but I needed to be prepared so that I could either take the unit indoors—out of the weather—or hermetically seal it in tarps until I was ready for it. And, as I pointed out earlier, the tray is heavy and any help carrying it … well … helps. Check with Old Creek for other delivery and assembly options.

PIECES AND PARTS

The key to a quick and sound installation on a project like this is to have a good plan and to be organized.

Site-Prep. With a unit like this, I like to spread out all the parts in an "exploded view" so I can see everything. The challenge with that, especially with a queen-sized bed, is that it takes up most of the floor space in a 12-by-12-foot room, so it helps to have all your stuff where you can find it, and in one place. It's not that much fun to run 6,000



Slide the side-panel rod through the boss pre-drilled in the tray.

laps around your bedroom chasing down your cordless drill. Get organized to get it done.

I not only organize my tools, but I organize all the little parts like screws and fasteners included with the Old Creek Wall Bed. I take them all out of the little plastic bags so I don't have to do it later when I'm busy assembling the bed. This saves time and keeps me from having to search for a little bag of stuff I misplaced.

Tools. I used just a few more tools from my tool pouch than I thought when getting the unit together, but basically, all you really need is a cordless drill, flat-head screwdriver and maybe a stud-finder.

Replace the e-clip. I found that the flatter and wider the surface I used to press the e-clip back on with, the easier it went. So instead of using the flat-head screwdriver I pried it off with, I used the cheek of my Klein Journeyman snips.

Tip: if you're worried about scratching wood floors (very possible with something this big and heavy) the wall-bed comes packaged in a lot of cardboard. You can spread the cardboard out over the floor to help protect it. And for future home-improvement plans, I find having a few large pieces of cardboard around eminently handy—it's better than a drop cloth for small jobs, and when you're done, just fold the cardboard in half and pour the debris into a trash can. This is much faster and easier than wrangling a smelly, old drop cloth.

Sides and Tray. Orient the side panels along the tray such that the side panels' front edges are facing the floor. Next, pop the e-clips from the pivot bar rods and slide them through the holes in the bed-frame tray. Replace the e-clips, securing the pieces. Repeat for the other side.

Prop the Tray Up. This is when it's good to be active in home-improvement, because you need a block of 4-by-6 or 6-by-6 lumber. If you're never doing any, it's unlikely you'll have any lying around and will have to make a run to the store. As luck would have it, I did. Otherwise, I would have cobbled something together from scraps. Again, it's handy to have a helper here, because you need three hands to lift the

Repeat for the other side.

Prop the top end of the tray on a hunk of 6-by.

DOUBLE DUTY AND MORE

When we designed the Old Creek Wall Bed into our new son's bedroom design, we were thinking about making the most of the space we have—not only in his bedroom—but in our house as a whole. The wall-bed opened the gate for a bunch of cool stuff for us.

First, while our boy is an infant, there will be no bed to either find another room for or wedge a crib around. His big-boy bed is there, of course, but folded neatly out of the way behind a furniture-grade panel, which is easy on the eyes. The wall-bed also enables us to use his bedroom—the last free room we have—as a guest room. When he's an infant, he'll bunk with us, and as a toddler he gets to crash with his sister (I'm sure they'll both love that).

But, imagine my surprise that the wall-bed is already paying off. My 8-month pregnant wife needs more room in our bed (and by "more room" I mean "the entire bed"), and I'm crashing on the wall-bed instead of the pre-back-surgery-unit otherwise known as my couch. I can tell you, it's great. And the side-tower is already active as a stash for the bedding and the baby stuff that's starting to accumulate.

It's great when you get more than you bargained for—in a good way. And when our son is old enough, how cool will it be for him to show his friends that his bed comes out of the wall?

tray and slide the block in.

Once you've propped up the bed tray, install the pistons over the pivot ball making sure the skinny end is down. I had a little trouble with this and had to "convince" the piston to be a little shorter with my hammer, but it worked.

Headboard. Without removing the tray from the block, raise each side panel and hook it on the tray using the pre-installed brass stops as the cleats.

Now install the headboard itself. Make sure the face side is oriented towards the floor. Make sure the top of the headboard is facing the top of the wall bed. Install the headboard by inserting the Allen screws through the pre-drilled holes and tightening.

Install the pistons over the piston ball, making sure the piston's skinny end faces the bottom end of the bed assembly.

Note: We installed our headboard with the hole for the light sensor on the bottom of the headboard. Part of it was confusion. The directions weren't entirely clear about which side of the headboard was intended

Install the headboard, making sure the face-side is facing the floor, and orient the side you want as the top-facing the top of the bed assembly.

Install the headpiece on the bed frame assembly by simply snugging the provided screws through the pre-drilled holes. Do not overtighten.

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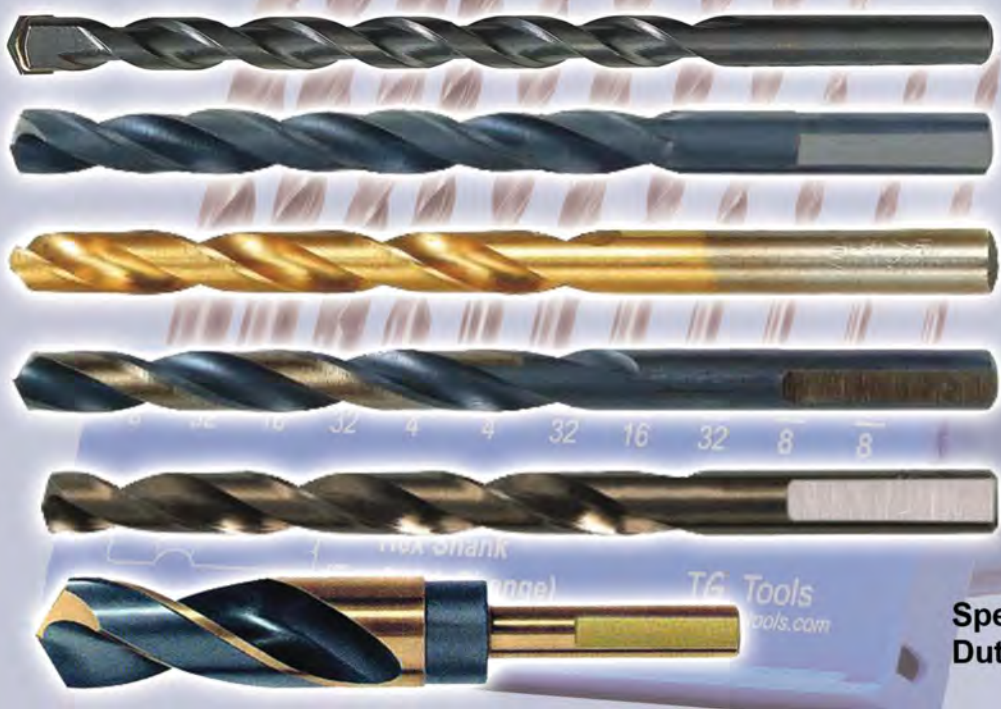

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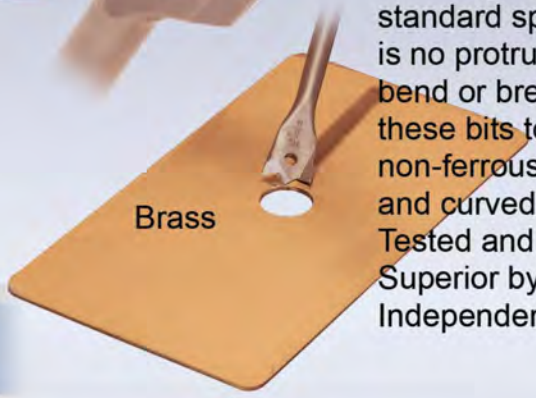

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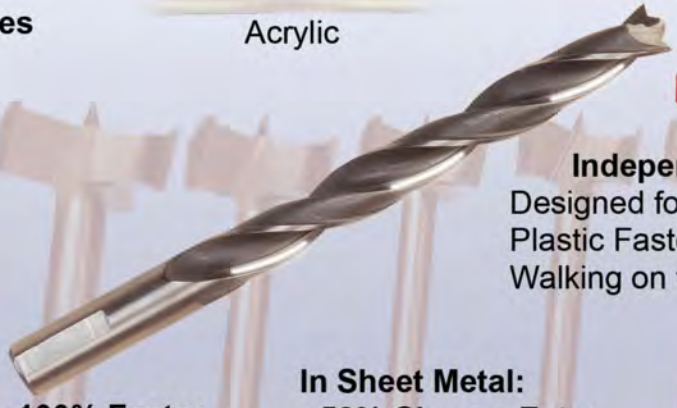

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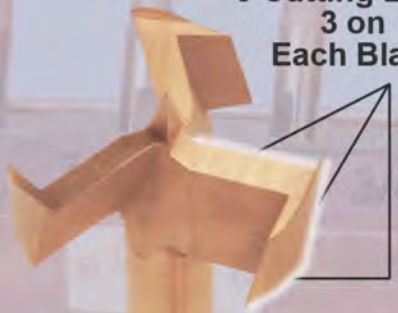

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as the top side, but once we figured it out, we liked it there. Technically, having the light-sensor at the bottom is upside down.

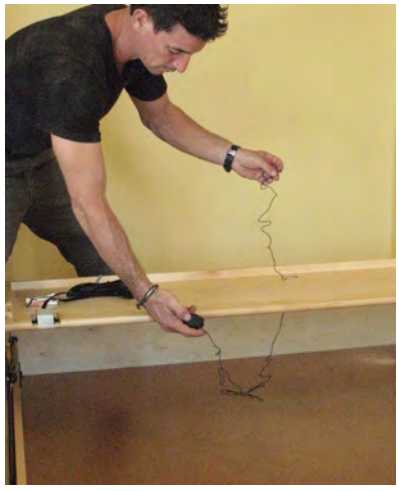
Crown Piece. Zap on the crown piece using the screws provided. Since the crown fits over the side panels, it's simply a matter of sinking the screws. Note: since you're working in hardwood, overdriving the screws is a recipe for shearing the heads off. All you need to do is snug them.

Lights. I spec'ed a light kit on my wall bed and I'm glad I did. I like that the included puck lights in the crown-piece light the bed space for reading or low-lighting the room. I also like that I don't need my electrician to hardwire anything. I can use an existing outlet to energize the light package. Nice.

I do wish, however, the installation instructions were a little clearer. The first thing to do is install the touch sensor puck in the pre-drilled hole in the head board—easy. Next, you have to chase a wire across the back of the headboard and up a channel in the side panel, which didn't quite hold the wire. I was able to stabilize the wire by snugging a drywall screw at the corner as a fulcrum. Needless to say, I neither punctured the wire nor overtightened the screw. Then, by the time the wire reached the transformer where it was to be plugged in, it was barely long enough. Long story short, it took some reverse engineering, but I made it work—and I tested it before raising the bed into place.

I also took pause at this time to make sure my layout was correct on the alcove I built, and that both the side tower and the bed unit would fit. Turns out I was dead-on, unless you count the base and shoe molding that I ran into the alcove. Once I stripped that, we were good to go. Please don't tell anyone I made such a mistake.

Now, however, comes the payoff … Raising the bed!



A light kit is a great add-on for a piece like this. Install it by feeding the touch-sensor supply wire through the pre-drilled hole in the headboard then inserting the wire in the dado along the side panel. At the crownpiece, make your connections.

READY, SET, LIFT

Stud Location. Find and mark your wall studs first. And, if you don't know, make sure you find out what kind of wall studs you've got. Most houses, of course, have wood, but if you're installing this in a city apartment (for which they were invented by the famous Murphy, no less!) or basement remodel, then you may well have steel studs and need the proper fasteners to anchor the bed. This is not a detail to be skipped or skimped on.

It appears that stud finders work for everyone but me, so I still use echo-location (I knock on the wall until the sound or feel changes) and a scratch-awl to drive through the drywall to make sure I'm on the money. Of course, I'm careful to punch the holes where no eyes can find them.

To make life a little easier, I transferred my stud locations to the back of the crown piece before lifting the unit into place, and then took a little extra time to predrill and countersink my screw holes. It's almost always

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easier to do this kind of thing on the ground than on a ladder.

Raising the Bed. This is another area where helpers help. Should you be flying solo, however, the bed unit is in the realm of liftable, and I was able to muscle it into place.

Check the reveals—then fasten in place. An out-of-level floor can deform the wall-bed and make opening or closing hard. Before fastening, double check that the reveals around the side-panels and tray are the same all the way around. My floor, for example, dropped 3/4 inch from one side of the bed to the other, and I had to shim the bottom with a maple block. Once you're comfortable that the reveal is primo, fasten the wall bed to the wall studs through the back of the crown piece. By the way, kudos to Old Creek on the screws they provided—they were no ordinary drywall screws; they were made for working in hardwoods.

Because my installation was in an alcove I built for the bed and side tower, I dry-fitted the pieces to make sure they fit—before lifting the bed into place.

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Find the wall studs. I always double check that what I've found is actually a wall stud by driving in my scratch-awl—in an inconspicuous spot—to make sure.

Transfer your stud locations from the wall to the crown-piece then predrill and countersink.

Test. After you drive the last screw, give the unit a couple of healthy tugs to make sure it stays stock still.

Side Tower. While I was locating the studs for the bed unit, I also located them (inconspicuously) for the side tower. I then measured their distance from the outside wall and transferred that measurement inside the cabinet. I then used cabinet screws to secure the side-tower to the wall.

And never one to under-build anything, I also predrilled and countersunk a few screws between the cabinet's face frame and the bed unit's face frame. This bed will see a lot of ups and downs as our son grows up, and I want to be sure he can depend on it staying where his old man put it.

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got the bed in and lowered the tray to accept the mattress. It was at least 9 o'clock at night, and I had worked all day on another job. I was dirty, sweaty and tired, so you can imagine my disappointment when I lowered the mattress-less tray and it wouldn't stay down!

Oh no! I did something wrong—or did I?

Running on vapors by this point, I lugged the mattress in from the other room. My wife held the tray down to the floor (it didn't take much effort) while I loaded the mattress on-board. That was it! The weight of the mattress resists the tension of the pistons perfectly!

DELIGHTED

And that was all it took. The tray raises and lowers into a primo maple cabinet sweetly. Indeed, "raises" is even the wrong word; it glides. The hardware designed into the bed unit is totally hidden and operates with plush ease, which the craftsman in me really loves. And the dad in me hopes our son loves it too. I can't wait to show him. **EHT**

Editor's Note: *Mark Clement is a remodeler, live-action trade show demonstrator and author of* The Carpenter's Notebook*, A Novel. Visit www.FormalFarmHouse.com.*

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INSTALLING A SYNTHETIC RAILING SYSTEM

By Kathy Ziprik

Add curb appeal the easy way
with a DIY-friendly railing kit.

INSTALLING A SYNTHETIC RAILING SYSTEM

Contractor Steve Roth recently purchased an old single-family home in Ohio to transform into a duplex. The original home featured a small rear entryway with a crumbling concrete step.

With a vision in mind for a more spacious, family-friendly exterior, Roth exchanged the single entry with a double French door to add light into the home and provide fast access to a new deck. Installed in just one afternoon, the composite deck and rail system is made to last with minimal upkeep.

Roth constructed the 8-by-14-foot deck on top of a concrete base with a wood subfloor. He added a QuickRail synthetic railing system with newel posts from Fypon on top of the deck and Fypon urethane moulding to trim out and finish the project.

"My research showed that the multi-layered PVC composite formula in the QuickRail system stands up to harsh weather," says Roth. "The system comes with a white finish that never needs painting and the product will never decay, warp, fade, chip, splinter or rust. That's the kind of easy-maintenance product I wanted on this house."

For the project, Roth selected the 36-inch high QuickRail rail kit with square spindles and used six 6-foot kits. Each kit includes the top and bottom rails, spindles, brackets, crush block and stainless steel screws. The company also has 8-, 10- and 12-foot kits. A stair kit, used to connect the rail system to steps leading to the back yard, includes similar products. For this project, two stair kits with slopes of 30 degrees were used. Fypon offers the stair kits to accommodate 24- through 40-degree slopes.

To unite the rail segments and establish the outline for the rail system, Roth first installed the QuickRail newel posts. Each QuickRail post kit contains a 4-by-4-inch square post, structural post mount, post kit base, taper cap, threaded rod, 3-by-3-inch square plate with 1/2-inch hole, and a variety of appropriate washers, lock washers, hex nuts and stainless screws to complete the installation.

Prior to starting the project, Roth pulled together the tools recommended by the manufacturer: tape measure, circular saw, power miter saw, screwdriver, cordless drill, wrench, level and protective eyewear.

"There were no surprises or real challenges to this project," says Roth. "It's really a quick and easy project and I can see any homeowner tackling this with professional results."

NEWEL POST INSTALLATION

Step 1 – To start, Roth added blocking between the joists directly under the deck surface to ensure a solid fit for the newel post. Then he drilled a 1/2-inch hole through the deck surface and joist block.

Step 2 – After aligning the center hole on the post mount with the hole in the surface, Roth inserted a threaded rod with one 1/2-inch washer, a 1/2-inch lock washer and a 1/2-inch hex nut on the top in that order.

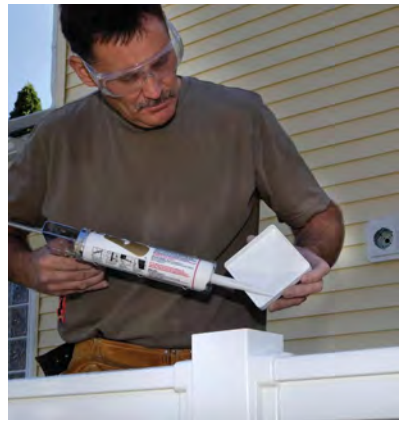
Step 3 – Roth then slid the 3-inch square plate flush with the blocking he had installed onto the threaded rod under the

mounting surface, followed by a washer and hex nut, leaving approximately 1-inch of threaded rod beyond the end of the hex nut. He tightened the hex nuts until the post mount was secure.

Step 4 – To further secure the post mount, use two of the stainless screws provided on each side of the post mount in the predrilled holes.

Step 5 – Roth next inserted the post into the post mount and made it plumb. The newel sleeve will sit comfortably inside the post mount. Once you get the newel sleeve plumb, you can lock it into place with the two screws on each side of the newel post sleeve. He was careful not to drill into the middle of the post mount and also positioned the screws at different heights so that the screws did not overlap one another.

Step 6 – Next, Roth slid the post kit base trim collar down the post and over the post mount.



Step 7 – As a final step, the taper cap was attached to the post sleeve with PVC glue that he purchased locally. After completing these steps, Roth proceeded to install the railing system.

RAILING INSTALLATION

Step 1 – Roth measured the inside opening between the mounting surfaces to verify that the opening was not wider than the length of the rails provided.

Step 2 – The bottom rail was laid beside the mounting surfaces with the spindle holes facing up. The rail should extend

INSTALLING A SYNTHETIC RAILING SYSTEM

past the mounting surface on each side. Place the first spindle hole on each end of the rail the same distance from the mounting surface.

Step 3 – When properly positioned, Roth marked both ends of the bottom rail and cut to length. Next, the top rail was laid beside the bottom rail, aligning spindle holes. Both ends were marked and another mark was made 1/4-inch in toward the center of the top rail from the marks transferred from the bottom rail. This allowed for some movement of the top rail to level the spindles later in the process. Lastly, the top rail was cut to length.

Step 4 – Roth located the crush block and used the following formula to determine the length: Desired clearance from bottom rail to deck + 3-1/4 inches = length of crush block. (The spindle lengths are sized for a traditional 2-inch clearance from bottom rail to deck.) Once the block was trimmed, Roth inserted the crush block into the precut hole on the underside of the bottom rail.

Step 5 – Bottom brackets were slid onto the bottom rail. Then the bottom rail was placed into the opening with Roth making sure the rail was level. With brackets centered on the mounting surface, attach with the provided 2-inch screws. When installing bottom rail brackets, make sure not to over-tighten screws. If the screws are over-tightened, flaps may not stay closed on the brackets.

Step 6 – Roth inserted the square spindles into the precut holes in the bottom rail. The precut holes are spaced to adhere to the 4-inch rule to meet ICC code compliance for balustrade systems.

Step 7 – The top rail bracket covers were slid onto the top rail. The metal top rail brackets were slide into the ends of the top rail. Roth placed the top rail on spindles inserting the spindles one at a time while holding at an upward angle and then making certain the rail was flush on all spindles.

Step 8 – Finally, Roth centered the top rail metal brackets on the mounting surface, making sure that the top rail was aligned above the bottom rail. He attached the brackets with the provided 2-inch screws after predrilling.

Step 9 – The spindles were leveled vertically by adjusting the top rail. Roth secured each end of the top rail by using two 3/4-inch pan head locking screws that were provided in the kit. Holes should be predrilled through both the rail and metal bracket 1/2 inch from the end of the rail. The hole for these screws must be pre-drilled using a 1/8-inch drill bit.

Step 10 – The bracket covers were slid over the metal brackets and secured in place using the provided 3/4-inch flat head locking screws.

To add the stair rails on both sides of his steps, Roth followed similar procedures for the straight rail installation, except working on a 30-degree slope.

For this stair application, the square spindles were spaced a nominal 3-1/8 inch apart. Stair Top Rail and Bottom Rail brackets and bracket covers were used to connect the stairs to the straight deck railing and to the post at the bottom of the stairs.

To finalize the project, Roth

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INSTALLING A SYNTHETIC RAILING SYSTEM

added weather-resistant urethane moulding around the exterior edge of the deck. He selected a profile traditionally used on door and window frames because of the detailed dimensions of the piece. After applying premium millwork adhesive to the back of the piece and fitting it in place, the moulding was secured with stainless steel screws to the deck. EHT

Editor's Note: *For more information and instructional details on the QuickRail synthetic railing system, visit www.fypon.com.*

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A Step-by-step Guide to Building Your Own Wood Fence

BUILD A SHADOWBOX PRIVACY FENCE

By Matt Weber

A fence can add a lot to a landscape. A fence can divide property lines, boost home equity, add to the outdoor décor and—as in our case—safely contain animals.

The animal in question is Raleigh, a goofy, brown cocker spaniel. My wife and I have recently moved to a new house and brought the dog along. Raleigh had grown accustomed to running freely throughout the yard, because our previous country home was safely secluded from traffic. However, the new house in the 'burbs is on a much busier street, requiring the wife or I to walk the dog on a leash each time he needs to tinkle. This is aggravatingly repetitive and increasingly uncomfortable in cold weather. We decided it would be nice just to shoo the dog out the door while we stay in the house, but we needed a way to keep him out of traffic. That was the genesis of our fence project.

DESIGN & MATERIALS

When it comes to constructing a fence, you have a ton of options to consider for materials and design. Fence materials range from metal and wood to vinyl and wood-plastic composites. For an easy-to-build fence, you might consider using pre-assembled panels, which can dramatically reduce the time you'll spend building.

However, if your yard is sloped, then to keep the panels level you'll have to stagger the panel heights where they fasten to the posts.

BUILD A SHADOWBOX

PRIVACY FENCE

Because our yard has a significant grade, the staggered panels would have created gaps at the level bottom of the fence, through which the dog could escape. Not a good solution for us.

We opted to build a wood privacy fence from the ground up, which would closely follow the grade of the yard and secure the dog from the perils of suburbia. For our picket design, we chose a shadowbox style, which alternates the position of the pickets from one side of the stringer to the other—a feature we felt added extra depth to the design.

For the framing lumber, we visited our local Lowe's to pick up 8-foot 4-by-4 posts and 8-foot 2-by-4 boards for stringers, all pressure-treated for outdoor use, with the posts approved for ground contact.

Mark off your fence layout with stakes and twine. Pull the line tightly between corner stakes, then stake the line intermittently.

For the fence boards or "pickets," we used a species of wood that is too often overlooked these days: Cypress. Cypress is actually a soft wood, although it grows alongside hardwoods and is usually grouped and manufactured with hardwoods. According to the Southern Cypress Manufacturers Association (www.cypressinfo.org), the wood's natural durability is a big benefit for exterior applications. Cypress generates cypressene, its own preservative oil, which makes its heartwood naturally resistant to

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A special feature to this railing is the ability to mix and match components and colors. You can really get creative! Alternate picket styles or choose sophisticated clear view glass, or mix and match colors. So many looks can be achieved with just a little imagination.

If you are looking for truely maintenance free products that are a cut above the rest, there is simply nothing like Last-Deck® Aluminum decking and railing. Last-Deck aluminum decking is proudly made in America. The most intelligent choice for your home.

insects, decay and chemical corrosion. These inherent strengths make cypress an ideal choice for long-wearing outdoor projects such as fences, decks, docks and siding.

We set the posts in Fast-Setting Concrete from Quikrete. You'll find two big advantages of this product: speed and ease-of-use. This specific formula of Quikrete saves time by eliminating the need to premix the concrete. Simply pour in the mix dry, straight out of the bag into the post hole. Once the post is buried, then pour about a gallon of water per 50-pound bag over the dry mix, which then cures in about 30 minutes. Using about 1-1/2 bags per post, we found this to be a quick method to set them.

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With the line in place, measure for the fence post locations and spray paint an "X" over the exact spot to dig.

We fastened all our connections with hot-dipped galvanized nails with ringed shanks for extra holding power. Make sure your fasteners are approved for exterior use in chemically treated lumber.

PLANNING THE LAYOUT

To a large degree, the construction and style of your fence

A rented two-man power auger and an electric demolition hammer helped greatly when digging the holes.

is up to you, but always check with local officials regarding building codes and any necessary permits. Some neighborhoods may also have certain architectural guidelines or "covenants" that restrict design, and of course you'll need to double-check that the location of your proposed fence is not on a neighbor's property. It's also wise to locate any underground utilities so as not to dig into disaster. You can dial "811" nationally to get underground utility lines, cables and pipes marked for free.

With that said, the height, décor and trajectory of your fence are up to you, and may be dictated by other obstacles in your yard, such as trees and sheds. For my fence, I ran 12 feet out from the front corner of my house (enclosing a side door), made a 90-degree turn and ran the side of the fence square with the house, parallel to the house wall. I squared in a large section of the backyard and ended the fence at the wall on the opposite side of the house. My design is just an example. Although your landscape may differ dramatically, the basic steps in fence construction remain the same.

First, mark your layout with stakes and twine. A stake should be placed precisely at every corner post as well as intermittently along the fence perimeter to keep the string tight and straight. With the layout completely lined with string, walk the perimeter with a tape measure and spray paint, painting a large "X" to pinpoint the precise placement of each fence posts.

Fence posts are usually 6 to 8 feet on center. The closer the fence posts, the stronger the fence. This measurement is also crucial for the sake of your materials, because dimensional lumber is sold in standard sizes. So, if your posts are accidentally spaced 8 feet, 1 inch apart, then an 8-foot board will be too

Set the corner posts first, stringing a new line between to line up the other posts.

Fill each post hole with 4" to 6" of gravel to allow drainage.

short. In such a case, you would have to purchase a 10-foot board and cut off 1-foot, 11 inches to create a stringer long enough. Obviously this would be an expensive waste of material.

SETTING THE POSTS

A good rule of thumb is to dig the holes for fence posts deep enough to bury 1/3 the overall height of the posts (2 feet deep at a minimum). Dig deep enough to set the post below the frost line, which will help prevent frost heaving. Additionally, dig an extra 4 to 6 inches deeper than the desired depth of the post to place a bed of gravel beneath the post for drainage. Sounds like a lot of digging, right? It is.

A traditional way to dig a post hole is with a manual clamshell digger and a trench shovel. These are tried and true tools, but if using them, expect to spend many hours, days or even weeks digging your holes, depending on the size of your fence.

To speed up the digging process, I highly recommend renting a gas-powered auger and recruiting another worker to help steer it. Note: Although, "one-man augers" are available to rent, my experience is these "one-man" models are nothing more than smaller, poorly designed machines that still require a second worker to control—and awkwardly, at that. The two-man models are primo, though, and with the help of a friend we had the holes completed in a single afternoon.

A Post-Pod (cepcotool.com) is helpful for one-man installation.

A traditional method to plumb and brace posts is to use a 4-foot level and a couple of pivoting wood legs.

While digging, we were also soaking the base of the posts in water sealer. The best method to do this is to use a tall bucket and place about 4 posts upright in the bucket at once. Their mass displaces the water, which rises to the top of the bucket, soaking the bottoms of the posts. After soaking for about an hour, we would rotate four new posts into the bucket to soak.

To set the posts, start by filling the bottom 4 to 6 inches of the holes with gravel, which will allow some degree of drainage to help prevent rot at the base of the post.

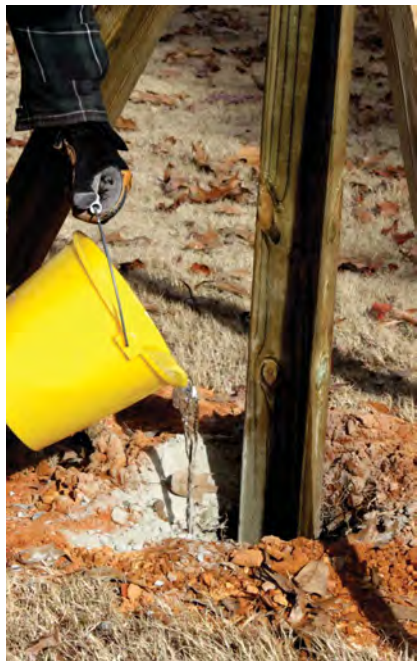
Quikrete Fast-Setting Concrete can be easily poured into the post hole dry. No mixing is required.

It's important to set all the corner posts first. If you have a helper, they can hold the post upright while you use a hand level to make sure it is plumb. A post level is also helpful, because it straps around the post while placing level vials on two sides of the posts. A post level frees your hands, which is very helpful if you're setting the posts alone.

Once you've established that the post is plumb left to right and back to front, you're ready

to add concrete. However, you must brace the post in place while you add the concrete. If you have a helper, they can hold it for you. Otherwise, you'll need to nail some scrap lengths of wood (I use 1-by-2's) that extend from the post to the ground to act as moveable braces, with the nails serving as their pivot point for adjustment. Plumb the post, adjust the braces to hold it plumb, and then add the concrete. Use a sledge hammer to pound the posts into the ground once surrounded by concrete, then recheck for plumb and adjust if necessary. It's a good idea to leave the braces in place while the concrete sets.

Another handy device for setting the posts is the Post-Pod from Cepco Tool. This is a real



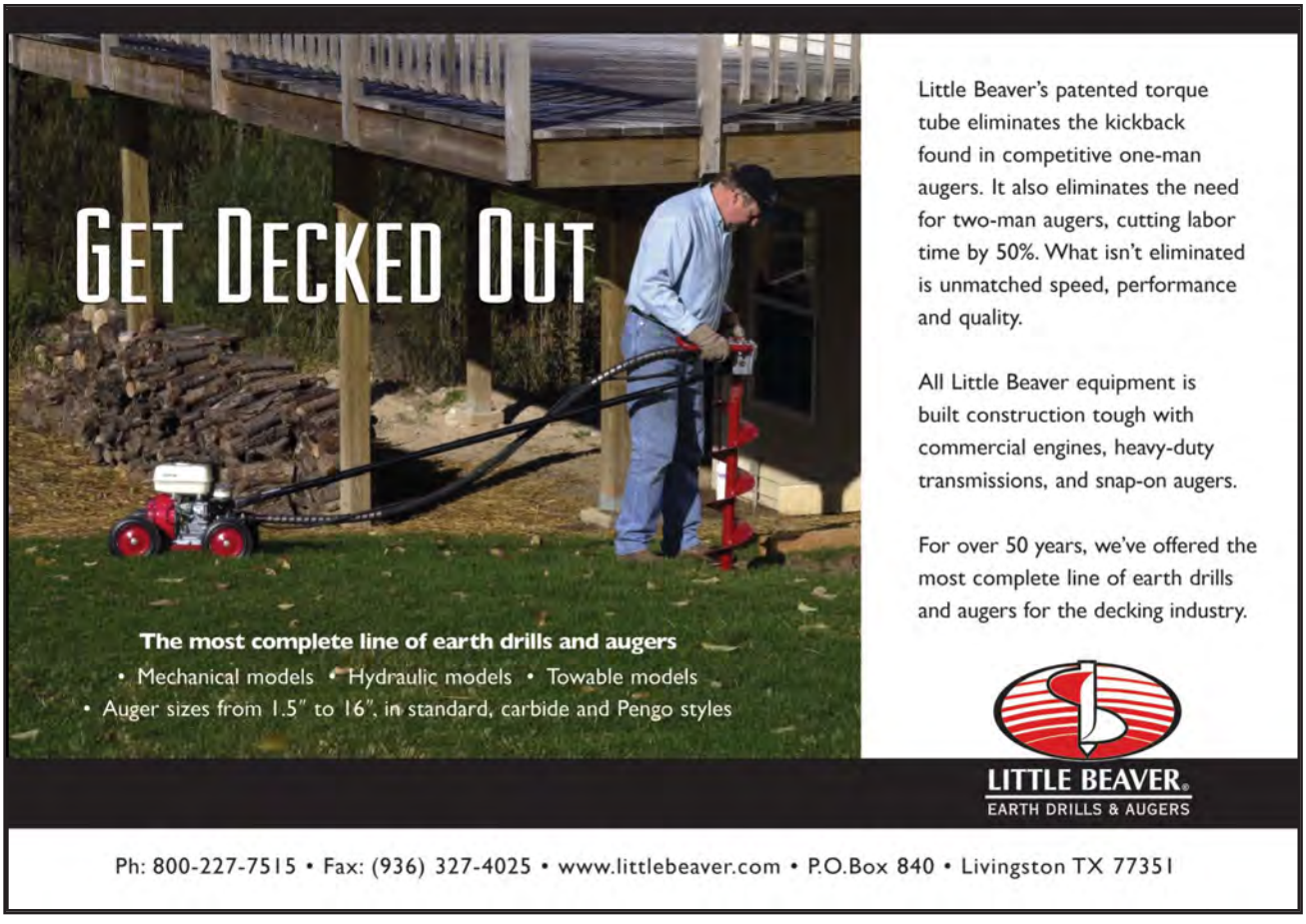
Pour the water over the dry concrete to set the posts.

Use a story pole to mark your stringer locations along the posts.

If you're toe-nailing the fence, then the stringers that follow a slope should be cut at a miter to fit flush between the plumb posts.

timesaver for the solo worker. Rather than cut and nail individual braces, the Post-Pod uses precut wood legs secured in a metal collar that grips the post. Just set the Post-Pod over the post hole. Place the post, check for plumb and tighten the Post-Pod collar over the post. Then add the concrete. You can then move the Post-Pod to the next hole without having to cut new braces, or having to remove and reuse the old ones.

As mentioned earlier, The Fast-Setting Concrete from Quikrete couldn't have been easier to use. However, if you're using standard concrete that should be premixed, you can mix small batches with a wheelbarrow and shovel or hoe, following the manufacturer's instructions for the required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amount of water. If you have a helper, then another option is to mix and pour with a Crete-Sheet, which eliminates the need for a wheelbarrow and mixing tool.

Allow the posts to set. Once the concrete is hardened, cover it with dirt and slope the earth away from the post to divert water.

Then, run a line of twine from each corner post to the next, keeping the line on the outside face of the posts. Secure the twine tightly. This string will be the placement guide for each of the posts between the corners. Proceed with setting the other posts in the same manner described above. When plumbing the posts, make sure the outside face of the posts lines up exactly with the string in order to keep the posts in a straight line.

A cordless nailer like the Paslode model shown is an excellent time and labor saver for any major framing project.

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NAILING THE STRINGERS

For this 6-foot tall fence I positioned the bottom stringer 10 inches up from the ground. The other two stringers were evenly spaced 23 inches apart. You may need to alter placement, depending on the height of your fence.

To prevent repetitive measurements, I made a story pole from a scrap piece of wood. I marked the position of each stinger on the pole with masking tape. I then placed the pole alongside each post and used the tape to determine each stringer location, marking it with pencil.

You have many options for attaching your stringers, such as face-nailing, mortise and tenon, or toe-nailing. For the shadow box style, I chose to toe-nail the stringers. By placing the 2-by-2 stringer vertically flush with the outside faces of the posts, the outside wall of the fence would be in a single plane, which makes alternating the pickets easier. To toe-nail, drive at least two nails into the side and one nail through the top of the stringer and solidly into the post.

Space the stringers evenly and nail them securely.

When it comes to nailing, expect a lot of it. One of the biggest helps on this project came from a cordless framing nail gun from Paslode. This nailer uses a battery to ignite a tiny burst of gas, which "explodes" the nail from the gun with all the driving power

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of an air compressor. Plus, there's no need for a compressor, an air hose or extension cord (which may weaken the compressor). When working in remote areas, the cordless nailer is kind of a godsend, and eliminates all the elbow-thrashing work of the hammer-and-nail method. I used Paslode's 3-inch ring-shank hot-dipped nails for the stringers and the 2-inch versions when nailing the fence boards.

One more note on stringers running uphill … Cut the ends at an angle so they fit flush between the posts. Here's a tip for how to do so: First, butt the square end of one uncut stringer against the penciled location on your left-hand post. Hold that end firmly against the post while you position the other end of the stringer so it overlaps the right-hand post at the pencil marks. Mark the stringer using the post as a pencil guide. Remove the stringer and take to the cutting table.

Assuming your right-hand post sits at a different height than your left-hand post, the mark should be at an angle. Use an angle finder to transfer that angle to the left-hand end of the stringer. Begin at the corner and cut off just enough material to match the angle. Now, measure the width of that angle cut. Go back to your right-hand angle mark. Keeping the same angle, redraw that mark, moving it over the same distance as the width of the cut on the left-hand side (plus 1/8 inch for blade kerf). This will compensate for that lack of material. Cut the stringer and install.

I used a homemade spacing block to keep the pickets even.

With all stringers in place, I then used a reciprocating saw to cut the tops of the posts so they were all the same height. When cutting the posts, it's smart to do so in a manner that diverts water from standing atop the posts, which could contribute to rot. You can cut pyramid-like crowns, cover them with post caps, or just slice them off at an angle like I did.

INSTALLING THE FENCE BOARDS

Attaching the fence boards or pickets is actually one of the simpler phases of construction. I cut a custom spacing block slightly narrower than the width of the fence boards, so there would be a

ALTERNATIVE FENCE MATERIALS

Although wood fencing products remain the most popular residential fencing type, competition from plastic and composite fencing is quickly growing in the consumer market. These alternative materials can offer similar aesthetics to genuine wood, while significantly reducing maintenance costs. In fact, some of the latest composite materials are used not only for the fence boards, but structural posts as well. TimberTech FenceScape now offers a a 5-1/4-by-5-1/4-inch self-supporting post. The post is 9 feet long, serrated to match the rails and has 1/2-inch thick walls to provide additional strength. Also new this year, post caps are available in decorative or internal designs to fit the 5-1/4-inch profile. Timbertech's Mountain Cedar fence line also includes fence boards in 5-, 6- or 8-foot lengths that come in either square cut or dog-eared tops. Additionally, FenceScape offers steel-reinforced rails for increased stability, and color-matched, powder-coated rail brackets that eliminate the need for toe-screwing and predrilling. For more information, visit www.fencescape.com or call 1-888-FENCE-52.

Drive two nails through the fence board at each stringer location.

slight degree of overlap among the alternating pickets.

Place the first board along the corner post and use a 4-foot level to find plumb. Nail it home, using two nails per stringer location. Place the spacing block next to the first fence board and position the second picket against it. Drive in one nail at the top stringer. Use that nail as a pivot while you find plumb, then nail that picket home as well. Follow suit down the stringer. In case your fence boards vary somewhat in height, keep an eye on the tops so they line up consistently and adjust their placement against the ground if necessary.

Once you reach the next post, return to the first post on the opposite side of the fence. On the opposite side of the stringer you will center a picket across from each space provided by your spacing block to achieve the alternating shadowbox style. Install the boards in the same manner, spacing, plumbing and nailing. Then repeat the same process for each set of stringers as you move down the fence.

FINISHING TOUCHES

I would highly encourage you to prefinish your fence with waterproofer and/or stain before assembling the fence. It's much easier than staining the fence once it's in place. However, I didn't do that here, due to a combination of editorial due dates and inclement rainy weather. I needed to assemble the fence for the instructive purposes of this magazine issue, and while I could build in the rain, I couldn't stain in the rain. Suffice it to say that there is a lot of this fence left unassembled and un-photographed, which I plan to pre-stain before assembling.

That being said, a quality wood treatment will help add your preferred color tone as well as help to protect against rotting, water-damage and damaging UV rays. I used Armstrong-Clark's semi-transparent Sierra Redwood tone, for a deep tone that will match the exterior house trim I hope to build next spring. But that's another story. **EHT**

This shadowbox-style of fence features alternating pickets for extra depth and some degree of see-through visibility.

The soft wood of the cypress fencing accepts stain easily and its preservative oils make it naturally resistant to decay.

I used Armstrong-Clark's semi-transparent Sierra Redwood stain, and highly recommend applying it to the materials prior to assembly. It's much easier.

For more tips and advice on how to build a fence, including ideas on gate construction and tips on building other styles of fence, visit www.extremehowto.com.

The Great Frame-Up

Retrofit mirror frames make bathroom remodeling easier.

By Matt Weber

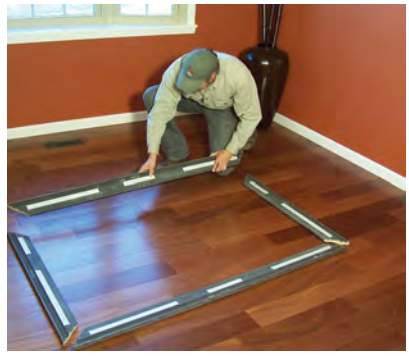
When it comes to DIY bathroom remodeling, most people agree that the easier the job, the better. When researching a simple way to dress up a bathroom mirror, our staff came across a couple of easy-to-install products that can really add pizzazz to an otherwise unremarkable, builder-grade mirror.

MIRRORMATE FRAMES

One artfully decorative solution to retrofitting a mirror frame comes from MirrorMate LLC. Homeowners can choose from more than 40 frame styles at www.mirrormate.com. Simply provide the company the dimensions of your mirror, along with its clearance from surrounding walls, and MirrorMate will custom cut the frame to fit the mirror. The company ships the frame directly to the homeowner, where it can be installed in under an hour directly to the mirror, with no need to remove the mirror from the wall. The frame is milled with channels on the rear that cover all clips and edges.

To install the Mirrormate Frame, first lay all four frame sections face down on a sturdy, flat surface and arrange the pieces as they should be assembled.

Each mirror installation kit includes plastic corner connectors, glue, adhesive foam tape, replacement mirror clips and cardboard placement corners. Remove the plastic corner connectors and find their corresponding slots. (There may be different connector lengths for different slot depths, depending on the style of frame).

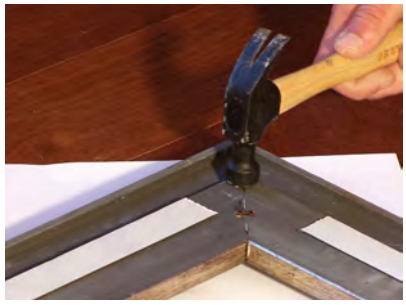


Lay out the frame sections and organize the kit components.

Apply glue to the adjoining miters, spreading it evenly to coat the ends entirely. Be sure to lay down paper or cloth to catch your drips. Align the glued ends and insert the plastic connectors into the corresponding slots. Press in with your thumb and then use a small hammer to tap the connectors flush with the rear of the frame. Repeat the process for each corner.

Turn the frame over and inspect the joints. Make sure

Match the connectors to the slots, then apply wood glue to the miters.



Tap in the plastic connectors and remove the excess glue.

each corner is properly aligned and adjust accordingly before the glue dries. Wipe away any excess adhesive with a damp cloth.

Allow the frame to dry for at least an hour. Sometimes a frame corner will show a thin white line at the miter, even when professionally constructed. If this is the case, you can easily disguise it like the pros do—use a water-based marker with a similar color as the frame to stain the miter line.

Once the glue is dry, the frame is ready for installation. Begin by folding the two cardboard placement corners according to the instructions provided with the kit. Apply the short strips of two-sided foam tape to the rear of the cardboard corners.

Then carry the frame to the bathroom and test-fit the frame, ensuring the rear channels fit over the mirror clips. The back of the frame should contact the mirror surface on all sides.

Note: If your mirror clips don't fit into the frame's channels, you

may have to replace the clips with the smaller clips that are included with the installation kit. Secure the mirror with at least two clips on both the top and bottom that mount into wall studs. Additional clips that miss a stud should be anchored into the plaster or drywall with the appropriate plastic screw anchors.

Position the frame against the mirror so that each edge contacts the mirror and use a hand level to level the frame on the

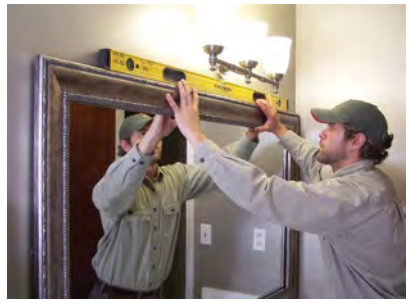
Use alcohol to clean the mirror surface.

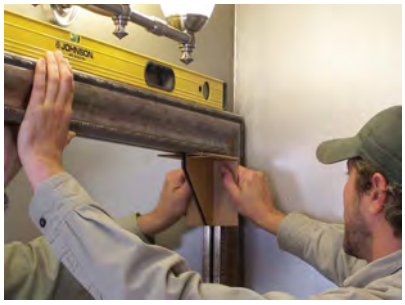
wall. When you're confident in the mirror's position, apply the two placement corners inside the upper right and left corners of the frame, adhering them to the face of the mirror. You'll need some assistance to hold the frame while placing the cardboard corners.

Now, remove the frame but leave the cardboard templates in place. Peel off the backing from the two-sided adhesive strips on the rear of the frame sections. These strips are what anchor the frame to the mirror.

Return to the bathroom mirror and carefully place the mirror back over the cardboard place-

If necessary, replace the mirror clips with smaller clips.





Adhere the placement corners to the mirror, then install the frame using the adhesive strips on the rear.

ment corners. Before sticking it to the wall, double-check with the level. Then press the frame firmly against the mirror to permanently affix it.

That's all there is to it—just step back and admire the beauty.

MIRREDGE

Another framing alternative is MirrEdge (www.mirredge.com), which is now available at most Lowe's Home Improvement Stores. MirrEdge is the quickest-to-install mirror frame product on the market. This is a system of edge strips and corner plates that are easy to apply around the perimeter of your mirror, while it remains in place on the wall. The framing strips are made from either woodgrain-finished polymer or Mirror Acrylic to match the mirror face. In addition to the clear acrylic mirror finish, choose from eight woodgrain tones, from contemporary Royal Oak to the new Decorative Dove White. Select either ornate or contemporary corner plates to make installation virtually effortless. The 1-1/2-inch wide mirror acrylic strips are available in 36-, 48-, and 60-inch lengths. The 1-1/2-inch wide woodgrain polymer strips are available in 36- and 59-1/2-inch lengths.

The only tools required to install the frames are a razor knife and a measuring tape, and the job can be completed in four easy steps. First, measure the mirror. Then measure and mark the MirrEdge strips to size. Score the strips at the desired length with a razor knife. Firmly hold the strip and snap it along the scored line. Lastly, apply adhesive pads and glue to the rear of the strips and set in place. You can transform a mirror of any size, and the cost is less than $50 for mirrors up to 63 by 63 inches. **EHT**

With Mirredge, transform mirrors up to 63x63" for less than $50.

MirrEdge offers mirror framing alternatives in both Mirror Acrylic and Woodgrain-finished Polymer.

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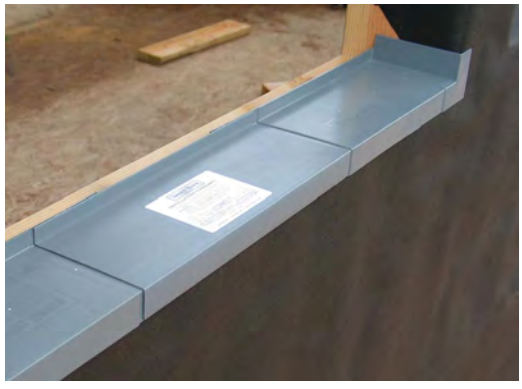
HOT PRODUCTS

JAMSILL GUARD

The Jamsill Guard is an adjustable sill pan flashing for exterior doors and windows designed to prevent water damage from window and door leaks. Injection molded of high-impact polymers that will not deteriorate over time, the product has been time-tested for more than 25 years with over 2,000,000 sold. Inexpensive and easy to install, the Jamsill Guard's simple design is more user friendly than comparable products on the market today. Its multiple piece, overlapping design allows the installer on-site adjustability to fit variance in the rough opening and is bonded together in the field with PVC cement. The Guard is available in eight different depths to accommodate most door and window applications in either 2-by-4 or 2-by-6 construction and is not visible after installation. Contact Jamsill at 1-800-JAMSILL (526-7455) or visit www.jamsill.com



CRETE-SHEET MIXING ALTERNATIVE

A handy tool to mix water and concrete is a plastic CreteSheet, which is basically a wide, thick plastic sheet with four handles. To use, simply pour in the concrete mix and add water according to the mix instructions. Then, grab the sheet by two of the handles and have a helper do the same on the opposite side. As the two of you lift the sheet and roll the mix and water back and forth, the concrete blends to a cookie-dough consistency. Then tilt the sheet to pour the mud. When working with a helper, the Crete-Sheet is faster and easier than mixing in a wheel-barrel. Visit www.cretesheet.com or call 1-866-571-7749.

BIOBASED INSULATION'S SOY SEAL

BioBased Insulation has launched Soy Seal, a line of soy-based, canned insulating foams for consumers. A closed-cell foam sealant that is spray-applied using a straw, Soy Seal expands to fill and seal gaps and cracks, and to reduce energy loss. According to the Energy Star program, air leaks are responsible for 25 to 40 percent of the energy used for heating and cooling a home. Stopping air infiltration is the most cost-effective way to reduce heating and cooling costs. In addition, Soy Seal is a more environmentally responsible choice than petroleum-based foam sealants because it uses Agrol, a 96-percent pure bio-polyol to replace a portion of the petroleum. By incorporating a rapidly renewable resource, Soy Seal supports farmers, helps to reduce our dependence on foreign oil and decreases your carbon footprint. Call 1-800-803-5189 or visit www.soyseal.net

VERSATILE HTX50 HAMMER TACKER

The HTX50 Professional Tacker features a new, unique innovative handle design with an ergonomic, soft rubber grip for comfortable all day on-the-job use. The unique handle has additional features that eliminate the most common problems with hammer tackers. A recessed hand grip and knuckle guard protects against finger scrapes on rough surfaces, while the rear slip guard prevents the HTX50 from slipping out of your hand. Another feature, the surface guard flange, helps reduce damage to roof underlayment and housewrap surfaces. The tacker loads two full strips of Arrow T50 staples in three sizes; 5/16-, 3/8- or 1/2-inch. The rugged, all steel frame construction and Arrow's jam-proof mechanism along with its versatility make the HTX50 hammer tacker an ideal tool for commercial or home construction jobs. Applications include the installation of roofing underlayment, housewrap, insulation and vapor barriers. Visit www.arrowfastener.com.

LEAFBLOX GUTTER PROTECTION

LeafBlox is a virtually maintenance-free new gutter guard that will not void the roof warranty. Stiff LeafBlox bristles fill the gutter, keeping debris out while allowing water to easily flow through. Most leaves and large items will pass right over the LeafBlox. Most small debris caught near the top of the brush will blow away or decompose through natural weather cycles. Your gutters will continue to flow, preventing home damage and keeping you off the roof. Plus, installation is fast and simple. No nails, cutting, drilling or tools are required. Fill your gutters end to end with the 36-inch straight sections and at the end of a rain gutter section, just fold any extra gutter guard brush length around the corner or back into itself and stuff into the rain gutter. LeafBlox can be used with any roof or gutter type or material. For more information, visit www.leafblox.com

CIRCUIT ALERT VOLTAGE-SENSING TOOLS

Three new professional-grade Circuit Alert Wire Strippers (GST-55M, GST-224M, GST-70M) from Gardner Bender enable electricians to accomplish multiple tasks with one tool. Users can strip and loop cable, crimp terminals, cut and rethread bolts, and even check for live wires while using the new Wire Strippers. "We re-engineered the tools so that the sensor is removable and interchangeable, while continuing to focus on the high-quality construction and functionality for which we are known," says Derek Erickson, product manager, Hand Tools, Gardner Bender. Each of the three wire strippers features Gardner Bender's signature ArmorEdge stainless steel, nick-resistant blades, dual grip positions, looping stations and a knurled pliers nose. One of the strippers (GST-224M) is made for stripping No. 14/2 and No. 12/2 NM cable, while the other two (GST-55M and GST-70M) can be used for stripping No. 10-18 AWG solid or stranded wire. The GST-70M also features a crimping station. For more information, visit www.gardnerbender.com.

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